

## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 1 – Harry's First Question**

When Harry woke up in Hogwarts' hospital wing after facing Professor Quirrel, who was possessed by Voldemort, he found Professor Dumbledore with him, and he asked the elderly headmaster to answer some questions, "...things I want to know the truth about...."

"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution. However, I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I beg you'll forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie."

"Well...Voldemort said that he only killed my mother because she tried to stop him from killing me. But why would he want to kill me in the first place?"

Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

"Alas, the first thing you ask me, I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day...put it from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older...I know you hate to hear this...when you are ready, you will know."

And Harry knew it would be no good to argue, but he had to anyway. "Sir, this makes twice that Voldemort's tried to kill me. How can I put it from my mind?" Harry said politely.

"It would be...too great a burden for one so young. You should enjoy your childhood," Dumbledore answered softly.

Harry made sure to be polite as he argued with the headmaster. "But sir, I already know that Voldemort wants to kill me. How would knowing why make it worse? With all due respect Professor Dumbledore, I think that knowing that he's after me is the burden, and there's no way that can be taken away from me. I have never enjoyed my childhood until I came here. The Dursleys have treated me like a slave not worthy of the air I breathe. The first happy day I ever had was when Hagrid came for me. I've had fun here, but I've also faced a troll, a possessed broom, a possessed teacher, and Voldemort himself. I've always wanted to be a normal boy, but I'm not. Please

tell me why. I need to know that I'm not just some kind of freak!" At this point young Harry was losing his battle against tears.

Professor Dumbledore was watching the little boy in front of him crying, and he realized that Harry was right. Putting him with the Dursleys, whom Professor McGonagall called, 'the worst sort of muggles imaginable,' did insure that Harry didn't enjoy his childhood. He made the decision so that Harry could have the blood protection that his mother provided, and now it was probably too late to change his mind.

But the fact was that Harry was right. He never did have, nor would he ever have, a normal childhood. Dumbledore thought to himself, 'He already knows Voldemort's after him, and he's not going to forget it. Why not tell him the reason?' Dumbledore made his decision.

"Harry," he said, "I had hoped that you would be grown up before you faced Voldemort again, but I see now I was wrong. You haven't been back in the wizarding world for a year yet, and you've already faced him. And this won't be the last time. You see, before you were born, a prophecy was made that said you would have the power to destroy Voldemort."

Harry looked genuinely surprised, "M-Me?"

Dumbledore nodded gravely, "Yes, you. This is a secret. Don't tell anyone, not even Mr. Weasley or Miss Granger. Voldemort heard part of the prophecy, and that's why he tried to kill you, and will, I'm afraid, continue trying to kill you when he has the chance. I can't tell you the exact contents of the prophecy, until you have learned a skill called occlumency, which is a way to stop Voldemort from reading your mind, should he attempt it." Dumbledore sighed, "I shall endeavor to teach you next year if you so desire. Although it may be too difficult at that age..."

"I-I'll try," interrupted Harry, "sir. I want to know what it says. I have to know." Then Harry's expression changed from determination to fear. "Why hasn't Voldemort attacked me at the Dursleys? Will he do it this summer?"

“Relax Harry,” said Dumbledore, “Voldemort cannot attack you at the Dursleys’ house. There is a reason I placed you there when you were a baby. There is a type of protection that I put there that required that you call the place where your mother’s blood resides home. In other words, it works because your Aunt Petunia is your mother’s sister. While you can still call home the place where your mother’s blood dwells, there you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort until you turn seventeen. That is when you become an adult in our world and that protection expires.”

Harry half-smiled, “Well, at least there is a reason I live there. But can’t you do something about how they treat me?”

“Not very much directly, but I believe I can make sure that you stay there for as little time as possible. You only have to live there for six weeks per year. I can make sure that six weeks is all you have to stay with them. If I’m not very much mistaken, Mr. Weasley will be asking his parents if you can spend part of the summer with them. I will speak to them of this matter, and see how they feel about this. I will also speak to a few other families as well. I am certain that I can arrange for you to spend all but the first six weeks of the summer away from the Dursleys. I will write the Dursleys about this matter, and send it in the muggle post.” Dumbledore looked at Harry and smiled. “I should probably send another copy of the letter with you, just in case they dispose of mine. I shall let them know that someone will be at the house to pick you up on July 21st at noon. I shall also remind them that if they do not find you there, I will send Hagrid after you.”

“Thanks,” said Harry excitedly, “Then I won’t have to spend my birthday with them.”

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The school year ended quickly after that, with Gryffindor winning the house cup after Dumbledore awarded extra house points to Harry and his friends. When he went home, the Dursleys had gotten the letter. Uncle Vernon said, “I wish you wouldn’t come home at all. They made him keep Hedwig in her cage, but aside from that, they didn’t treat him very badly.

The main reason for this was that they didn't know he wasn't allowed to do magic outside of school. Harry hadn't told them that rule, but he had feared that Aunt Petunia would remember that from growing up with his mother. He spent most of the day up in his room. Since Professor Dumbledore had specifically mentioned that Harry needed his books so he could study during the summer, they even allowed him to keep his trunk in his room (Dudley's second bedroom), with the instructions, "Don't you dare take any of that freak rubbish out of that room!"

Harry did enjoy the way they seemed to fear him without admitting it, but he wasn't about to push his luck. He kept his copy of the letter from Dumbledore on his desk. The only thing that concerned him was that he hadn't gotten a single letter from either Ron or Hermione since the summer began. He hoped they hadn't thought it over and realized that he got them into too much trouble last year, so they didn't want to be his friends anymore. "Well," he thought to himself, "I'll deal with that when I have to. It wouldn't be the first time I didn't have any friends. At least Dumbledore will get me out of this place soon."

Despite the lack of communications, Dumbledore was as good as his word. At five minutes before noon on July twenty-first, there was a knock on the door at Number Four Privet Drive. Harry was already waiting downstairs with his trunk and Hedwig's cage. Dudley was not at the house. Uncle Vernon opened the door to reveal a middle-aged red haired man in a bad muggle outfit who was smiling as he said, "Hello, my name is Arthur Weasley." He held out his hand as though to shake Uncle Vernon's. However, Vernon silently stared at him. "Er, I'm here to pick up your nephew, Harry Potter."

"Hello, Mr. Weasley," called Harry as he got up from his chair and grabbed his trunk and cage, "It's good to meet you. I'm Harry Potter." He put down his trunk for a second to shake Arthur's hand, which was still pointed at Uncle Vernon. "I've got all my stuff in my trunk, so I'm ready to go."

"Alright then, Harry." He turned back to Vernon, whose face was purple by this point. "Mr. Dursley, you won't see your nephew for nearly a year. Aren't you even going to say goodbye to him?"

"It doesn't matter," said Harry, as he grabbed his trunk and started to step out of the doorway. However, Mr. Weasley put a hand on Harry's shoulder to stop him.

"Well," said Arthur to Vernon, who was eying the wizard's wand.

"Bye then," muttered Vernon.

"See you later," said Harry.

It apparently was enough to satisfy Arthur, because he let Harry leave. Harry walked outside to see an old turquoise Ford Anglia parked in front of the house. He saw his best friend Ron standing next to the car. He happily walked to the car, struggling with his stuff. When he got to the car, Ron opened the trunk Harry could put his stuff in it. Ron said, "Harry, how come you haven't returned Hermione's or my letters?"

"What letters?" said Harry, sounding confused. "I didn't get any letters, and Uncle Vernon hasn't allowed me to let Hedwig out of her cage, so I couldn't send any either."

Ron smiled, "I figured it was something like that, but I wonder why you haven't gotten any letters. I mean Errol, our owl, is old, but he always delivers his letters, even if it does take him longer than most owls."

"Well anyway," said Harry, "It's good to know that you and Hermione have been writing me, and even better that I get to leave the Dursleys." By this time, Mr. Weasley was back at the car, so Harry said, "Mr. Weasley, thanks for letting me stay with you."

"It's an absolute pleasure!" said Arthur, "You'll have to tell me all about those wonderful muggle devices that run off of eceltricity."

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When he arrived at the Burrow, he was greeted by the rest of the Weasley clan. Percy politely said, "Hello, Harry," and shook Harry's hand.

Fred said, "Hey Harry. We wish we'd have picked you up."

"We'd have flown the car," said George.

"Flown?" asked Harry, not sure if they were pulling his leg.

"Boys," said Arthur, smiling, "Just because it can fly, doesn't mean we should fly it. If we were seen flying the car, I could get into serious trouble."

"So the car can fly, but you're not supposed to?" asked Harry, unsurely.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Weasley. "It's against the law. It's good to see you, Harry!" She then squeezed him into a bone-crushing hug.

He then saw Ron's little sister standing there looking uncomfortable. He was proud that he remembered her name. He walked up to her, said, "Hello Ginny," and reached out his hand to shake hers. Her face paled and she ran out of the room. Fred and George started laughing and Mrs. Weasley started yelling at them. Harry was worried he'd gotten the girl's name wrong. He turned to Ron. "Er, what did I do? Did I get her name wrong?"

Ron chuckled slightly, "No, her name's Ginny alright. She's been talking about you all summer is all. I think she fancies you."

"Now Ron," said Mr. Weasley, "It's just a crush, and you shouldn't have told Harry."

"I should apologize for embarrassing her," said Harry.

"Don't worry about her," said Ron, "She'll get over it."

"She shouldn't have to be uncomfortable in her own home. If your family is kind enough to let me stay here, I should be friends with all of you. I don't want to ruin Ginny's summer."

He then walked off in the direction she'd run. As he did, he looked around, fascinated at all the magical objects there. A magical clock with hands for all the family members that said where they were

particularly intrigued him. He saw the petite redhead outside sitting on the porch.

He walked up to her and saw she was looking away from the house. "May I join you?" She turned toward him, startled, and got up. He noticed she was crying. She started to walk away from the house and he called after her, "Please don't go. This is your house. If you want, I'll leave. I just wanted to apologize for making you uncomfortable."

She stopped and turned around. "Y-You don't have to go," she said quickly.

He smiled, causing her to blush furiously. He could tell she was fighting the urge to run away. He said, "I guess you've heard a lot of the things people say about me, huh."

"Y-Yes," she said, still standing still watching him.

"You, like almost everyone else, have probably been raised to think of me as some kind of hero. I don't know what happened on the night my parents died. I do know that I wish it never happened. I don't think of myself as some kind of hero. I'm just a boy who's trying to make a new friend."

"F-friend?" asked Ginny, not daring to believe it.

Harry smiled again and walked up to her, extending his hand to shake hers. "Friend." She shyly took his offered hand and briefly shook it. "Do you think you feel like coming into the house?"

"Er, ok. But everyone is gonna tease us," said Ginny, "They, er, seem to think I, er, have a crush on you for some reason."

Harry smiled, deciding not to let her know how obvious it was. "That won't bother me. I've had a lot worse things said about me than that I was dating a pretty girl."

He pretended not to notice how red her cheeks went when he complimented her, and held the door open for her to walk through. She walked through the door, and together they came back into the living room to a lot of teasing from the twins, who started singing,

'Harry and Ginny, sitting in a tree, K I S S I N G,' which caused them both to blush. Harry was surprised that he'd blushed over that, but then, that had been the first time he'd been accused of that particular offence.

He greatly enjoyed his time at the Burrow, playing quidditch with the boys, and Ginny at Harry's insistence, once he found out she liked to play. He even let them all take turns using his Nimbus. The boys were surprised at how good a flier Ginny was. She confided in Harry that she'd been sneaking their brooms out of the broom closet for years. Before he knew it, he was silently celebrating his birthday, happy to be away from the Dursleys. He hadn't said anything to the Weasleys about it, because he felt they were already being too kind to him. He refused to guilt-trip them into doing something special for him.

The day started out as any other day, with a quick chess slaughter by Ron after breakfast, followed by a game of quidditch with George and Ginny against Harry and Ron. Fred was a random beater against both teams. Harry and Ginny were chasers, while the others were keepers. Harry found that Ginny was at least as good a chaser as himself (which was fine because his favorite position was seeker), but fortunately, Ron was a better keeper than George, so when they decided to quit, Harry and Ron's team was still barely in the lead, so they won 250 to 230.

After the game, while everyone else was going inside, Ginny said, "Harry, could I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure Ginny. What's up?"

"Er, I just want to thank you for, y'know, insisting that they let me play quidditch. Now that I've proven I'm a decent player, I think they'll let me play whether you're here or not. You're a really good friend."

"Er, thanks, but it was nothing. I just knew how I used to feel when no one would pick me to play on their team at muggle school because they knew Dudley and his gang would beat them up."

"What? That's terrible. And your aunt and uncle let him treat you like that?"



“They encouraged it. At least until this summer. They don’t know I’m not allowed to hex them so they were afraid if they pushed me too far I’d turn them all into lizards.”

“That’s advanced magic,” said Ginny.

“I didn’t say I could. Truthfully, the only hex I know is the full body-bind, ‘Petrificus Totalus,’ and that’s cause I saw Hermione do it to Neville the night we went after the stone. I’m sure Ron’s told you about that.”

“Er, yeah, although he’s probably a bigger hero in his version than yours,” said Ginny, appearing to look over his shoulder toward the house.

“My oldest brother Bill, who’s a curse-breaker, taught me a hex when he visited earlier this summer. He said if anyone tried to bother me at Hogwarts, to use it on them and they’d never bother me again.”

“Really,” said Harry excitedly, “What is it? How do you do it?”

“It’s called the ‘Bat-bogey hex,’ but I’m not telling you how to do it, in case you end up using it on me.”

Harry looked slightly hurt. “Why would I use it on you?”

“For revenge after I end up using it on you,” she said, smiling. She then said, “Come on, let’s go inside,” before he had a chance to argue.

He followed her inside, and was surprised to see that no one was in the living room. Ginny said, “I guess it’s already time for lunch. Everyone’s probably in the kitchen.”

“It’s strange that your mum didn’t call us inside,” said Harry as he opened the door to the kitchen.

“SURPRISE!!!” was shouted at Harry from behind and in front of him. He looked around to see the Weasleys, Hermione (who for some reason had soot on her outfit), Professor McGonagall, and Professor Dumbledore. He saw a table full of goodies, including a cake that said,

'Happy Birthday Harry.' He blinked back tears as he realized that he had just walked into the first birthday party of his life.

Hermione walked up to him timidly and said, "Happy birthday, Harry. I'm glad they got you away from the Dursleys. They didn't seem too friendly. I hope you've enjoyed your summer."

"Yes, I've been enjoying my stay here. It's great to see you again, Hermione!" he said, beaming. Harry didn't notice Ginny frown for a moment behind him. "I thought you were on vacation with your family."

Hermione said, "I am. We're staying at a wizarding house, so I just flooed here for the party. It was my first time. It's a lot different to do it than to read about it. I fell over. At least I got the destination right. I would hate to wind up in some dodgy place like Knockturn Alley."

"Flooed?" said Harry, "What's that?"

"A magical way to travel by fireplace," said Mrs. Weasley. "We'll be going to Diagon Alley that way when we get your booklists."

"Oh," said Harry, nervously, thinking that if Hermione fell on her first try, he'd probably break his leg on his first try.

"Happy Birthday, Mr. Potter," said McGonagall with a small smile on her face.

"Thanks, Professor," said Harry.

"Happy Birthday to you," said Dumbledore. "If you've no objections, I've taken the liberty of asking the Weasleys if it would be alright for me to stop by once a week starting this Tuesday at seven p.m. to begin your lessons during the summer so that it won't take as much time away from your studies during the school year."

"Er, that should be fine, professor. Thank you."

"Lessons?" asked Hermione, sounding extremely interested, "What kind of lessons are you giving Harry, Professor Dumbledore? Is it

something I could learn as well? I'm sure I could get my parents to let me floo here on time for the lessons."

Albus smiled at her eagerness, "Well, I don't suppose an extra student would make much difference if you wish to learn it as well. What I'll be teaching Harry is called occlumency. It is..."

"...a defense against legilimency, which is an invasion of the mind with the purpose of stealing information from the victim." She smiled broadly. "That sounds absolutely fascinating! I'd love to learn it, although I am curious why Harry is studying it."

"Alas, Miss Granger," said Dumbledore, "That is an extremely confidential matter which I'll thank you for not asking Mr. Potter about."

Hermione's ears turned pink, "Er, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

"That's perfectly alright, Miss Granger. Curiosity is not a sin. In truth, your thirst for knowledge is most refreshing. I wish that more students had a similar desire to learn."

"I'd like to learn occlumency, too," said Ginny, who'd been listening in.

Dumbledore's eyebrows raised, "Really, Miss Weasley?"

"Yes," Ginny said firmly.

Albus' eyes twinkled. "Apparently your thirst for knowledge is so great that you can't wait for your first year to begin. You may join the lessons if you wish, but you may find it difficult to keep up. Normally I'd wait for a student to be in his or her fourth or fifth year, but it is important to Mr. Potter that he learn it now. Mr. Potter, the gift I gave you, which you haven't opened yet, is a book on occlumency. I'd like you to read chapter one before our first meeting. I request that you share that book with your new classmates until the first lesson. I'll bring two more books with me then."

"But professor," said Hermione, "We can buy..."

“Nonsense,” said Dumbledore with his eyes merrily twinkling. “If I’m not mistaken, Miss Weasley’s birthday is in August and yours is in September. Consider them early birthday presents. I can’t show favoritism toward Mr. Potter, now can I?”

“I guess not,” said Ginny, happily.

“Then we’re in agreement. If you’ll excuse me, I believe that there is a slice of cake that is calling to me.”

After Dumbledore walked away, Ron, who’d been listening from afar, walked up and said, “I can’t believe you guys! Taking a class during the summer? That’s nuts!”

Harry said, “I have to for reasons I’m not allowed to say, and if the girls want to take the lessons too, why shouldn’t they?”

“This class isn’t even part of the Hogwarts curriculum, so it’s a unique opportunity,” said Hermione.

“And it’s being taught by Dumbledore himself,” said Ginny.

“Maybe Harry has some important reason,” said Ron, “but you girls are both mental.”

“Come on, Hermione,” said Ginny to the brunette, “I’m sure Ron doesn’t want to hang around ‘mental’ girls like us. Besides, there’s something I want to talk to you about.” They both left the boys by themselves.

Ron smiled and said, “I’m glad we got rid of them. Let’s have some cake.”

Harry said, “You shouldn’t treat them like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like they don’t mean anything to you! Like they’re freaks. That’s the way the Dursleys treat me.” Harry stormed off in the same direction the girls had gone.

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Ginny had dragged Hermione to her room, not completely closing it, and asked, "I need to know, is there anything going on between you and Harry?"

Hermione blushed, "Er, no, er, why?"

"Then why'd you blush?" said Ginny.

"Honestly, he only likes me as a friend..."

"...but you'd have no objections if he started to fancy you?"

Hermione's cheeks got pinker. "Er, maybe, why?"

Ginny put her head down to hide her red face. "Er..."

"Don't tell me?" said Hermione. "You fancy him, too?"

"Maybe," said Ginny, "but since right now he doesn't fancy either of us, I think he's fair game."

At that moment, they heard someone walking down the hall, with Ron shouting after him.

"Come on Harry! Why do you care so much? Especially about Ginny. You've only really known her for a few weeks! Do you fancy her or something?"

Harry turned pink. "Er, well, I, I don't know. Maybe. I'm not sure." At that moment, Ginny was smiling ear to ear behind her door. "I do know that I'm her friend."

"Do you think you might end up dating her?" asked Ron.

"Er, maybe. I don't know. I'm just as likely to date Hermione." Hermione was smiling at that moment.

"HERMIONE?! Why would you want to date her?" asked Ron, sounding as though Harry had said he wanted to date a goblin.

Hermione was glaring at the door. It's truly amazing that a hole didn't burn through the door from Hermione's glare.

"SHE'S A NICE GIRL!" shouted a clearly upset Harry, causing Hermione to calm down a bit. "They both are! Any bloke would be lucky to date either of them!"

"I know Hermione's nice, but she's, she's, ...it's like dating McGonagall!" It took all the restraint Hermione had, in addition to Ginny's hand on her shoulder, to stop her from opening the door and slapping Ron across the face right there. She'd never been so insulted in her life.

"Just because she studies more than us doesn't mean she wouldn't be a great girlfriend. She's always been nice to me. Do you know she said I was a great wizard before I went and faced Quirrel? Me."

"Oh, I get it. She's joined the 'Harry Potter fan club' like Ginny, so now you're deciding which one you want. Must be nice."

"You know what Ron, let's just drop this conversation. I'm going back down to my party."

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The girls heard Harry walk down the stairs while Ron went on to his room. "Well," said Ginny, "That was informative."

"Yeah," said Hermione. "Ron thinks I'm scum and Harry can't decide which of us he fancies." She sighed. "I guess this is a competition."

Ginny said, "May the best redhead win."

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After a few minutes, the girls rejoined the party, followed soon afterward by Ron, who seemed to remember that there was food downstairs. Harry enjoyed the rest of the party. After he'd opened his gifts, he told Hermione, "You're the fastest reader I've seen. Do you think you can read that chapter and return the book tomorrow?"

Hermione smiled at Harry. "Of course, Harry. You can always count on me. I'd be glad to talk about the chapter with you once we've both read it."

Ginny said, "Why don't we read it together once Hermione returns the book?" At that moment, Hermione realized she had a tactical disadvantage.

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After the party was over and the guests had left, Ginny said, "Harry, can you come up to my room to talk about our occlumency lessons?"

"Er, I suppose so, but there's not much to talk about."

When they got in her room, Ginny surprised Harry by saying, "Either you know something or Dumbledore wants to tell you something that needs to be kept a secret."

Harry's ears turned red. "Er..."

"I knew it!" said Ginny excitedly, "Which is it?"

"I, er, can't say..."

"I know you can't tell me what the information is. I'm just curious if you accidentally learned something you shouldn't have or if you're about to be told something you should know."

Harry sighed, "I'm going to be told something. That's all I can say."

"I know," said Ginny, "I was just curious. I..."

At that moment, a house elf appeared in between them, and said, "Harry Potter, sir, Dobby is honored to be meeting you, and your Wheezy. Dobby is having trouble sir. Dobby is needing to tell you both something..."

"Then why don't you sit down," said Harry.

"S-Sit down?" said Dobby beginning to cry.

"Yeah," said Ginny, "There's room on my bed."

"Dobby has heard of Harry Potter's greatness, but never has Dobby been asked to sit down by a witch or wizard, like an equal."

"I guess you haven't met many decent people then?" said Ginny.

"No I haven't. Bad Dobby!" At that moment he started banging his head on the wall until both Ginny and Harry pulled him away. "I is punishing myself! I has spoke ill of the family I serve. They is planning great evil against you two!" When Dobby tried to punish himself again, Harry and Ginny together held him so he couldn't move.

"What family is that," asked Ginny.

"Malf," said Dobby, shutting his mouth.

"The Malfoy family?" asked Harry.

"Yes, diary, Wheezy girl, Riddle," he managed to say before struggling away from them, snapping his fingers, and disappearing.

"Great evil, the Malfoy family, diary, Weasley girl, riddle," said Harry.

"Apparently there's a riddle that involves me and a diary," said Ginny, "The Malfoy family is behind it, so naturally it's evil."

"Strange," said Harry. "I guess we should be on the lookout for the Malfoys."

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Hermione returned the borrowed book the next day, and Harry read the first chapter at the table with Ginny sitting next to him, reading along. It was actually surprisingly quite interesting. It told about a technique to clear your mind before you sleep every night, which they both vowed to begin immediately.

It warned that a full out assault on the mind of one who has no occlumency shields will always destroy what little resistance they may naturally have, making them completely vulnerable to all mental



assaults. It will always give them severe headaches, and is likely to cause serious brain damage if the victim's mind isn't extremely strong to begin with.

Therefore, the way to learn occlumency is by the teacher starting with a weak legilimency attack, and slowly increasing the intensity of the assault as the student's occlumency shields strengthen. It said that occlumency requires extreme concentration to learn, and is therefore recommended for people over the age of fourteen. However, it can be learned at any age as long as the student is willing to work hard and concentrate. It suggested a few mental exercises that help people learn to concentrate.

The first lesson went alright (Dumbledore brought the two books for the girls), although Hermione (whose parents did allow her to come) did best, with Harry next, and then Ginny, they all were able to block a low level assault by the end of the first lesson. Dumbledore said, "I'm very impressed with all three of you. You've obviously been practicing. If you do as well in the next lesson, I may wish to increase the frequency of these lessons to twice a week. Is there anything else you wish to discuss before I depart?"

"Actually," said Harry, "Ginny and I got an unusual visit from Malfoy's house elf."

This got both Hermione's and Dumbledore's attention. After they'd explained exactly what had happened, Dumbledore said, "I believe that it would be wise to be especially attentive should you encounter the Malfoy family. Do not touch anything they give you. However, if you notice them slip you anything, perhaps this diary, or a parchment with a riddle, pretend you didn't notice so that they believe they were successful. Most importantly, do not touch whatever they give you, and contact me immediately."

Dumbledore left, and the three children immediately decided that it would be best if no one else knew about it. Otherwise, they may act more suspicious of the Malfoys than usual. Hermione offered to help Harry in occlumency, but he declined, saying, "I think I'm doing alright in this, and I don't want to take more of your vacation time away."

Soon afterward, Ginny decided that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach, so she asked her mum to teach her how to bake. This plan backfired in two ways. It took her away from Harry for more time than she'd expected, and Harry ended up being the one to taste her first failed attempt at cookies. She nearly burst into tears when she saw him desperately trying to be polite as he forced the foul thing down his throat.

She said as steadily as possible, "Harry, you don't have to pretend it's good. Just spit it out. I'm sorry."

Her mum helped her by immediately getting Harry a drink and saying, "My first attempt at baking was even worse than this. You watch, by the end of the summer, Ginny will be an excellent baker."

Harry smiled, "I remember when I was eight, and could finally reach the stove, Aunt Petunia made me learn to cook. It took weeks for me to get everything right so that they didn't have any serious complaints. Not that they'd ever compliment my cooking."

"Of course, she never taught me to bake because she was afraid I'd sneak into the kitchen and bake myself cookies or something. Ginny, I'm sure you'll learn quickly. In the meantime, we can give your cookies to Ron. He'll eat anything." At that statement, both Molly and Ginny laughed.

They were interrupted by an owl bringing them their lists of schoolbooks. They then decided on the day they would visit Diagon Alley. Hermione had just gotten back from vacation and arranged to be there as well, and to leave with the Weasleys and stay at the Burrow for the last few weeks of the summer, to make sure she could be on time for her lessons (at least that's what she told her parents).

Harry, who'd witnessed Hermione traveling by floo several times over the past few weeks, confidently stepped into the fireplace first and said, "Diagon Alley," clearly, and soon found himself on the floor of the Leaky Cauldron with his glasses missing. While he was still feeling around for them, Ginny landed on top of him.

She said, "Sorry Harry," and noticed him blindly feeling around the ground. She got up, looked at the floor, and spotted his glasses

quickly. She picked them up and handed them to him, saying, "Here, is this better?"

"Thanks, Ginny," he said, while putting them on.

After an uncomfortable trip to Gringotts, where he saw how much more gold was in his vault than the Weasleys, they made their way to Flourish and Blotts, where the famous author, Gilderoy Lockhart, was signing books. After being forced into a photograph with Lockhart and handed a collection of the pompous git's (as Harry thought of him) books as to his horror it was announced that he was the new defense teacher, Harry gave his free books to Ginny, claiming he could pay for his own. Then the Malfoys showed up.

First Draco was showing how jealous he was of Harry's attention by telling Harry how much he must have loved it. Ginny immediately came to Harry's defense, and got labeled as Harry's girlfriend by Draco before Lucius Malfoy introduced himself. After looking at Harry's scar and insulting the Weasleys, taking a second-hand book out of Ginny's basket as evidence of their poverty, Lucius got in a fight with Arthur Weasley until the owner of the bookstore sent a bat bogey hex at them.

It hit Malfoy Sr. Lucius managed to return the old book to Ginny before running out of there, pursued by mucus bats, while she, Harry, and Hermione were watching very carefully.

After the shopping, Harry, Ginny, and Hermione immediately went up to Ginny's room to carefully inspect the book Lucius had placed in Ginny's basket. Inside it, they found a diary with the name, 'Tom Marvolo Riddle' written on the side.

"Riddle," said Hermione. "This is it! It must be some kind of dark object!"

"Let's floo Dumbledore now before it hexes us," said Harry.

"Are you sure," said Ginny, staring at the offending book, "It just seems..."

"Snap out of it, Ginny," said Harry, "You heard Dumbledore!"

She shook her head, "Oh my...sorry. I don't know what I was thinking. It's like the book was calling me."

"Let's floo Dumbledore now," said Harry, and all three marched downstairs.

Ginny grabbed some floo powder as the rest of the family watched. She threw down the floo powder, said, "Professor Dumbledore's Office," and stuck her head into the fireplace. Ginny's head disappeared for about sixty seconds, and then she stood up (her head intact). "Dumbledore's coming here now. He almost fell off his seat when I told him the name on that diary. That's when he..."

"Good evening," said Professor Dumbledore.

"Good evening," said Molly, "but why are you here?"

"You saw the Malfoys today in Diagon Alley?"

"Yes," said Molly.

"Lucius hid an enchanted diary that used to belong to Voldemort among Ginny's things."

"What?" everyone said at once.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle is Voldemort's real name. He invented the name Voldemort because he disliked how common the name Tom is." Albus ignored all the flinching everyone but Harry was doing at the name. "Where is the diary now?"

"Upstairs, in my room," said Ginny, now really scared.

Dumbledore rushed up the stairs, followed by everyone, and pointed his wand at the diary, which glowed green as a result of whatever spell he was casting. Albus put down his wand and said, "This is not just a bewitched object. It holds a piece of Voldemort's soul. I believe that it was Mr. Malfoy's intention for that piece of Voldemort's soul to possess Ginny, and to use her to bring him back."

“Can we prove that and send that Death Eater to Azkaban?” asked Arthur angrily.

“No,” said Hermione sadly. “We only know that the diary was inside Ginny’s book when we got it home, and that Mr. Malfoy handled the book. We didn’t see him actually slip the diary in the book.”

Albus looked thoughtful for a few seconds. “There may be a way.”

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 2 – Starting Second Year**

“How?” asked Arthur Weasley.

Dumbledore smiled, his eyes twinkling. “Using a pensieve, I can extract and view the memories from the time that Mr. Malfoy had your daughter’s book. I believe she, Mr. Potter, and Miss Granger would’ve been paying the most attention when the incident occurred, since they already knew Mr. Malfoy was planning something. With your permission, I’d like them to accompany me to my office for a few minutes.”

After Arthur nodded, Dumbledore levitated the small diary into a bag that Mrs. Weasley gave him, and stuck it in a pocket. He then walked down the stairs and toward the fireplace, followed by Harry, Ginny, and Hermione. When they arrived at his office, Dumbledore told them, “Please make yourselves comfortable while I find an appropriate place to store this abomination until I can properly dispose of it. Have a lemon drop if you’d like.”

They sat down and watched the aged headmaster point his wand at a cabinet, causing it to glow green as they heard a clicking sound. Albus opened it and moved a few things around on a shelf, finally clearing enough space. He pulled the bag with the diary out of his pocket and unceremoniously placed it on the shelf. He then closed the cabinet and pointed his wand at it again, this time causing it to glow red. He then walked up to another cabinet and opened it, revealing an object Harry had never seen before.

“This is a pensieve. It can be used for viewing memories, which are admissible in court. In turn, I’m going to place my wand tip near each of your heads, and I’ll need you to concentrate on everything that happened from the time Lucius Malfoy removed the book from Miss Weasley’s basket until he put it back.”

Starting with Ginny, he pulled the silvery glowing streams of thought from all three kids, ending with Hermione’s.

“Now, let’s all of us hold hands and will lose ourselves in your thoughts.” They grabbed each others’ hands (with Harry in between the girls while Hermione held Dumbledore’s hand as well as Harry’s),

and Dumbledore leaned into the pensieve with the others following suit.

Harry found himself falling into Flourish and Blotts, watching himself and the others until he forced himself to concentrate on Lucius Malfoy. While watching him intently, he caught the moment the diary was slipped into the other book. "There!" shouted Harry.

"Right you are, Harry," said Dumbledore. After they watched all three memories and seeing that they all were in exact agreement, Dumbledore pulled them out of the pensieve. "I believe that I shall be contacting Minister Fudge tomorrow morning. Thank you for your assistance. I would offer you a cup of tea, but I believe the Weasleys will probably be worried should you stay longer than you already have. You did, after all, accompany me while I was carrying a dark object."

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That night, Harry dreamed that he was sitting outside Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor in Diagon Alley eating a sundae with the Weasleys and Hermione, when Voldemort, with a normal body and the face he'd seen on the back of Quirrel's head, showed up with Lucius Malfoy. Together, the two of them shot green lights at everyone around Harry, killing them as he watched in horror as he searched in vain for his wand. Voldemort then hissed, "Don't feel so lonely. You're about to join them." He pointed a wand, which Harry noticed was his own, at Harry, who saw the bright green flashes he'd dreamt of all his life.

He awoke with a start, and found he was drenched with sweat and breathing heavily. But aside from that, he was fine. He quietly got out of bed to avoid waking Ron and crept out of the room to splash water on his face. After he'd dried off, he quietly sneaked down the stairs, avoiding the step that creaked, and wondering why the Weasleys hadn't fixed it. He got a glass of water from the kitchen and sat on the couch thinking about his dream. He realized that if he were attacked, he wouldn't know how to defend himself or anyone else. He'd just gotten lucky when he faced Quirrel. He didn't know what to do. He buried his face in his hands and sat there miserable.

“Harry,” came a female voice from near him. He looked up and saw both Ginny and Hermione.

“What’s wrong?” asked Hermione.

“Oh. I, er, had a nightmare.”

“Really?” said Ginny with a concerned expression, “What about?”

“Voldemort,” said Harry, causing the girls to flinch.

“W-Was it about when you faced Professor Quirrel?” asked Hermione.

“No. I dreamed that we, along with the rest of the Weasleys, were eating ice cream together when Voldemort showed up with Lucius Malfoy, and they killed you all in front of me while I was trying to find my wand. He then turned on me, and before he killed me I realized that Voldemort was using my wand. I woke up just as he was killing me.”

Both girls walked up to Harry and put a hand on one of his shoulders. “It was just a bad dream,” said Ginny.

“Understandable, considering what happened yesterday,” said Hermione.

“I, I just felt so helpless, like when I was locked in the cupboard by the Dursleys. I never want to feel like that again! And I don’t know what to do about it.”

“Er, if you feel that strongly about it, maybe you could ask Professor Lockhart for extra lessons. All of the things he’s done in his books...” said Hermione.

“That arrogant git?” said Harry incredulously, “All he’d teach me is how to pose for a bloody camera.”

“Language, Harry!” said Hermione, “and you don’t even really know Professor Lockhart, so how can you judge him so harshly?”



"I know all you and the other girls, even Mrs. Weasley, were doing is fawning over him while he flashed his fake smile at you," snapped Harry.

"Well," said Hermione, "Er, a lot of girls do the same thing when you're around, and that doesn't mean you're a fraud, or that you like the attention."

"He was eating it up. I could see it in his face; he called me up there so that his stupid book-signing would make the front page. I'm not asking for his help. If I ask anyone, it'll be Dumbledore."

"Ok Harry," said Ginny, "Ask Dumbledore. You're probably more comfortable with him anyway. If you need anything at all, I'd be more than happy to help you."

"As always, I'm willing to help as well. I can read some books on defense and show you the best spells I find," said Hermione.

"Thanks," said Harry, "to both of you. You're both really good friends. I think I should try to get some sleep, and I suggest you do the same." He got up and walked back to bed.

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A few days after that, while the three of them were taking their occlumency lessons with Dumbledore, the aged professor said, "That concludes today's lesson. I must say, you've all been doing remarkably well, especially considering your ages. I'm afraid I'll only be able to give one more lesson before school starts. After that, we'll have one lesson per week for the first four weeks, and then we'll be finished. Of course it would be a good idea for me to test your shields every month or so, just to make sure you don't get rusty."

"I have shown your memories to Minister Fudge, as well as a few other ministry officials, and they have informed me that Mr. Malfoy will be arrested tomorrow and put on trial. You may be required to testify. If the trial occurs while school is in session, you will of course be allowed to leave the school. If you've nothing else to discuss, I should be getting back to the office."

“Actually, professor,” said Harry, “There’s something I’d like to discuss, er, privately. I hope you don’t mind, girls.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Ginny.

“We know when we’re not wanted,” teased Hermione. She winked at him and the two girls left.

Dumbledore pointed his wand at the door for a moment while asking, “Well, Harry. What did you want to discuss?”

“I would like to have extra defense lessons, more advanced than second year. The next time I meet Voldemort, I want to be better prepared. I would also prefer if they were not taught by Professor Lockhart or Professor Snape. I met Professor Lockhart the other day, and I truthfully don’t trust him for some reason. I don’t think I can explain it, but I’d be more comfortable learning from someone else. I know Professor Snape is probably good at that subject, but as you know, he and I don’t get along very well, and I don’t think it would be a good idea for us to have a class alone.”

Dumbledore sighed, “I suppose that’s a good idea. You and Professor Snape would probably glare at each other for an hour instead of having a productive lesson. Don’t tell anyone else this, but I don’t entirely trust Professor Lockhart either, but he was the only applicant. Hopefully he’ll be an adequate teacher. I did see your picture with him in the Daily Prophet, by the way. You certainly don’t appear happy about it. It’s quite humorous the way your photographic self is trying desperately to escape your new professor while he firmly holds onto you.”

Harry chuckled a bit at that. “I’d also like to talk about that diary. You said it has a piece of Voldemort’s soul in it. How is that possible?”

Dumbledore took a deep breath. “That is a very important topic that we must discuss. There are some things I could tell you now, and some things I wouldn’t risk until your occlumency lessons are finished. I would prefer to wait until then to give you the whole explanation than to break it up, but I’ll leave that up to you.”

Harry appeared lost in thought for a few seconds. "I think I'd rather hear the whole thing at once than to have it split up. I guess I can wait a month."

"Very well," said Dumbledore. "I feel that it would be good for us to continue the weekly meetings after our occlumency lessons are over, so that I can attempt to prepare you for what lies ahead. I'll start with the prophecy, and then tell you everything about Voldemort that I know, including what I know about the diary."

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Both Harry and Hermione started studying hard as soon as they got their new books. Ginny reluctantly joined them so that she could spend time with Harry, while making sure that Hermione wasn't alone with him. Hermione had always been studious, and Harry had decided that he needed to learn as much as possible to prepare for his destiny.

Harry wasn't as fast of a reader as Hermione, who could read all her books before school started, so he used a different method than hers. He'd read a chapter in one book, and then switch to another book. Harry especially paid attention to the potions book so that Snape wouldn't be able to humiliate him. Using that method, he got through the first half of each book before school started. Ginny used his method as well with her first-year books, and got further than Harry. He really hated Lockhart's books. They seemed more concerned with how to keep your hair to stay in place during a duel than how to actually fight one.

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Before long, it was September 1st, and they were at Kings Cross Station, heading toward Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , with Ginny proudly carrying a basket of cookies that she had successfully baked the day before. Lucius Malfoy had been arrested, and was scheduled to be tried on September 9th. His house elf Dobby had 'accidentally' left the entrance to the secret chamber under the drawing-room floor open, and several dark items were confiscated.

However, the ministry had yet to see what Lucius Malfoy had up his sleeve. (If they would just roll it up they'd see a symbol that would show them exactly what kind of man he is.) Harry, Hermione, and the Weasleys crossed the barrier with no problem, and got onto the train. They found an empty compartment where Ginny, Harry, and Hermione sat on one side with Ron sitting across from them scowling. He said, "Harry, why don't you sit by me so that the girls have more room?"

"We're fine, Ron," said Ginny happily.

"We've got plenty of room for HARRY," said Hermione, making it clear that no one else could sit by her.

At that moment, their compartment door slid open, revealing Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle. "Well, what do we have here? Two weasels, a mud..."

"Get out, Malfoy!" shouted Harry angrily.

"Why don't you go visit your worthless father in Azkaban?" said Ginny as she pulled out her wand.

Draco's ears went red, "How DARE you...Whaaa!" At that moment Ginny had performed her Bat Bogey Hex. Draco ran out of the compartment, followed by mucus bats and his brainless followers, who couldn't understand how their leader had been bested by a first year.

"Was that the hex you told me about?" chuckled Harry.

"Yes," said Ginny proudly, "The Bat-Bogie Hex."

"You really shouldn't have done that, Ginny," said Hermione, "You could get in trouble before school even starts."

Harry looked at her as if she were crazy. "Don't you remember what he and his father tried to do to her just a few weeks ago? She has every right to hex him, and I don't care what the teachers say."

"Thank you very much," said Ginny.

Ron added, "I only wish I'd hexed him first."

Hermione's cheeks went pink and her head went down a bit. "Er, of course I remember what they did. I didn't say Draco didn't deserve it. I, I just don't want Ginny or you to be in trouble is all."

"Hermione," said Harry, "When you let people get away with things like that, they'll keep doing it again and again, making it worse each time. Draco is a Voldemort follower in training. If he doesn't learn his lesson now, that's what he will become. Only next time he won't be insulting people. He'll be hexing them, and eventually killing them."

"I remember how that happened with my cousin Dudley. When I was younger he was just insulting me. I wasn't allowed to say a word against him, and then he started hitting me. I wasn't allowed to defend myself, and eventually his whole gang would beat me up all the time. They'd do it so that teachers would never see it happen, so they never got in trouble. Just like Draco."

"This summer, however, he left me alone, and the reason is that he believes I can defend myself now. People like him and Draco only understand power. Dudley knows I have more power than him, so he fears me and leaves me alone. That's the way the police system works. Criminals know that police have power, so they fear the police, and hide from them."

"Now Draco will fear Ginny, although I would suggest Ginny, that you watch your back in case he tries to get revenge. I'll certainly help you if I can, but he is a coward and will probably try something when I'm not around. It'll be the three of them against you."

Ginny was staring at him wide-eyed, but before she could respond, someone else walked into their compartment. It was Neville, so he joined them, sitting next to Ron. He greatly enjoyed the story of Ginny hexing Malfoy.

When the train ride was over, Ginny reluctantly left the others to ride the boats with Hagrid and the other first years, while Hermione got to ride the horseless carriages with Harry. Ginny could just picture Harry choosing right then to start dating Hermione. She convinced herself

that those two would be snogging in the Great Hall by the time she was sorted.

Her brothers had told her she'd have to fight a dragon to get sorted, but when she'd asked Harry about it, he told her all she'd have to do was put on a hat. Although the rest of her family had all been sorted into Gryffindor, she silently feared she wouldn't be. She thought of the way she'd been sneaking her brothers brooms and worried that the hat would put her in Slytherin. As she watched the others get sorted, she was going over every bad thing she'd ever done in her mind, hoping it wouldn't put her in the Dark House, as she thought of it.

When it finally got to be her turn and she put on the hat, she was silently begging, "Please put me in Gryffindor; Please put me in Gryffindor; Please..."

"Gryffindor!" shouted the hat, causing Ginny to grin broadly as she made her way to the table where Harry was already seated.

She ignored all the applause, except Harry's. She saw the Hermione was sitting on one side of him, while he'd saved a spot for her on his other side. 'We've really got to get this sorted out,' she thought to herself as her brother stared at the three of them.

"Never had any doubt you'd make Gryffindor!" said Harry happily.

"That makes one of us," she said.

"Did you know that hat actually wanted to put me in Slytherin last year?" said Harry. "I told it I wanted anything but Slytherin, so it put me in Gryffindor. I guess once it realized I wouldn't be happy in Slytherin, it saw reason."

"Really?" said Ginny, but before Harry could respond, Percy walked up to her.

"Congratulations on making Gryffindor. That makes the whole family, now. I must admit I was worried with the way you like to disobey the rules, but then I suppose if you consider that even Fred and George made Gryffindor, I didn't have much to worry about. I'm glad I don't have to deal with the shame of having a sibling in Slytherin or

Hufflepuff.” He began walking away, but Ginny heard him say something about Ravenclaw not being so bad.

“That Percy can just talk and talk and then talk some more,” said Ron.

“He really does seem to like the sound of his own voice,” agreed Ginny.

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The next morning when they got their schedules; Harry, Hermione, and Ginny had an extra note that said that they would have lessons with Dumbledore every Tuesday evening at eight o’clock. As they were comparing schedules, Hermione noticed that Harry had an extra class on his schedule. “Harry,” Hermione asked, “You have one more class than me. How did that happen?”

Harry looked down at his schedule, and sure enough, in addition to his other classes, he had a class called, ‘Advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts,’ that was taught by Professor Flitwick. It listed a book that he’d have to order. Harry smiled to himself. “I guess that’s what Dumbledore came up with. I asked him for help in learning defense; I guess he talked Flitwick into teaching me.”

“That’s wonderful,” said Hermione, “I heard that Professor Flitwick was a dueling champion when he was young.”

“That’s great, Harry,” said Ginny, “I wonder if he’d let me join the class. You’ve kind of gotten me worried about Malfoy.”

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Hermione had also wanted to join the class, but Professor Flitwick apologetically answered both girls the same way, “I’m sorry, but I’ll need to be personally dueling Mr. Potter for the class to be as effective as possible. I don’t have enough time to teach more than one student, and Harry asked first. I do have a suggestion though. You may ask Harry to teach you what I teach him. It would be a mutually beneficial arrangement. It will give him a chance to practice what he has learned.”

Harry and the girls had taken their first occlumency lesson in Dumbledore's office. It went the same as usual, with the aged professor very pleased with their progress. They all met Fawkes, a magnificent phoenix that had bonded with Dumbledore. The headmaster mentioned the magical abilities of phoenixes, while they gazed at Fawkes in wonder. Hermione excitedly said, "I've read about them of course, but I never expected to see one at Hogwarts."

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Harry had sent Hedwig to Flourish and Blotts with the order right after breakfast the morning he'd gotten his schedule, and had received the book the day before his first defense class with Flitwick. The professor had told him in Charms class to read chapter one before the first lesson, and that's what Harry did. He was nervous as he opened the classroom door for his first private lesson with Professor Flitwick.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 3 – Lessons**

“Welcome, welcome, Mr. Potter!” said Professor Flitwick enthusiastically. “Did you have sufficient time to read chapter one? I understand that you just received the book yesterday.”

“Yes, sir,” said Harry.

“Splendid!” said the small professor. “Then tell me, Mr. Potter, what is the first thing someone should learn about dueling?”

Harry chuckled. “How to avoid a fight.”

Professor Flitwick grinned at him. “Correct. That being said, some fights are unavoidable. If you are going to duel, what’s the first thing you should learn?”

“How to avoid being hit.”

“Exactly,” Flitwick said merrily. “Five points to Gryffindor. You paid attention to what you were reading. It doesn’t matter how many spells you know. If you get hit with something as basic as a body-bind, you won’t be able to use any them. The chapter talks about three ways to avoid being hit. What are they?”

Harry closed his eyes for a moment to concentrate. “Er, a magical shield, using objects as shields, and dodging the spells.”

“Wonderful,” he said enthusiastically, “Another five points! You really are serious about this, aren’t you? Sometimes I’ve had the impression that you weren’t doing your best in charms.”

“That’s gonna change this year,” said Harry confidently. “I need to learn everything I can.”

A broad smile appeared on Professor Flitwick’s face. “Excellent! I see Miss Granger must be rubbing off on you.”

Harry realized that Flitwick had no idea about the prophecy, so he decided to go along with that answer. “Yeah, I, er, saw the difference

in our grades, so I realized that I need to take my education more seriously.”

“Good. This lesson, I’ll be teaching you the Protego shield. It can protect you against most hexes, with exceptions of particularly powerful spells, such as the killing curse. There are other more powerful shields I’ll teach you later as you advance. To create this shield, you...”

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After a difficult, but enjoyable two hours, Harry emerged from the Charms classroom feeling drained. He was almost immediately accosted by his two favorite females.

“So, how’d the lesson with Flitwick go?” asked Ginny.

“What did you learn today? Remember, Professor Flitwick said you should teach us for practice.”

“Er,” said Harry, “He taught me the Protego shield charm.” He then sighed. “He also said I should start exercising every day so I can handle the physical aspects of dueling. He wants me to start jogging and doing a bunch of other exercises. He gave me a list.”

“Can we join you?” asked Ginny.

“If you want,” said Harry. “You’ll have to be ready to exercise an hour before breakfast, cause that’s when I’m doing it. Six o’clock.”

Ginny’s eyes went wide, but Hermione said, “I’ll be there!”

“Er, me too,” said Ginny without much enthusiasm.

“So, when are you going to teach us the shield?” asked Hermione eagerly.

“Er, how about tomorrow after dinner? I’ve got homework right now. I’m going to the library.”

“We’ll join you.”

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The next day, Harry got up at five-forty-five and went down to the common room at five minutes before six to meet the girls for their first exercise session. Hermione was already down there, looking far too cheerful for that ungodly hour, and Ginny dragged herself downstairs about two minutes later with her eyes half-open. They went downstairs and jogged around the grounds, which woke them up. Once they were done exercising, they went back to Gryffindor tower for showers.

After dinner, the three of them went to an empty classroom to practice the protego shield. They'd invited Ron, but he said, "I've got enough homework as it is," while he was beating Neville in a game of Exploding Snap.

"Well," said Harry, as he noticed the girls looking at him expectantly, "The protego shield can probably block anything someone like Malfoy could send our way, but doesn't work against things like the killing curse."

Hermione raised her hand in the air while Ginny rolled her eyes. "Er, Hermione, it's just us. You don't have to raise your hand."

"It would be rude to interrupt you," the brunette girl said.

"Well, er, what did you want to say?" said Harry.

"I just wanted to add that according to the book, the reason you learn this defensive spell first is because if you get hit by a spell, knowing all the offensive spells in the world won't help you."

Harry smiled, "That is correct. How do you know what the book says?"

Hermione's ears went pink, "Er, well when I read the name of the book you were using, I ordered myself a copy immediately."

"Show off," said Ginny.

"Just because you didn't think of doing the same thing..."

“Hold it,” said Harry, getting annoyed. “Why are you two trading insults?”

Both girls blushed. Hermione said, “Er, no reason. Sorry.”

Ginny added, “Yeah, sorry.”

Harry started teaching them the shield, and within fifteen minutes, Hermione had learned it. Harry said, “Good job, Hermione.”

Ginny muttered, “Know-it-all.”

Hermione said, “Face it, you’re too young...”

“Girls,” said Harry, his ears getting pink. “What is wrong? Why are you acting like this? You were friends. Did you have a fight I don’t know about?” Both their faces turned pink, but neither would speak as they avoided Harry’s eyes. “Come on; answer me, or this lesson’s over.”

“Er,” said Hermione, “We, er well overheard what you said to Ron about us on your birthday...”

Ginny continued with her head down, “About not knowing, er, which one of us you, er, liked...”

“Er, and I guess we’ve kind of been, er, competing. Sorry,” said Hermione.

Harry blushed furiously. “Er, you heard that?”

“Yeah,” said Ginny.

“And now you’re competing. Er, does that mean you both, er, fancy me?” he said without looking at them.

“Yes,” answered Hermione.

Harry took a deep breath as he did his best not to smile. “Well, the first thing I’ll tell you is that if I wanted someone who insults others, I’d be dating Malfoy.” Both girls put their heads down in shame at the insult, but neither could deny it. “I’d say that aside from that, what I

said then is still true. I don't know which of you I like better. You're both very special in your own way. You're both wonderful people, and beautiful girls." Both girls blushed at his compliments.

"I don't know what I did to deserve either of you to fancy me." He then sighed. "I'm not ready to make a decision right now, but I need to know that if I do decide to date one of you, the other won't act like a Slytherin and start hating me and the girl I choose. Otherwise I won't choose either of you. Our friendships are more important to me than that."

Hermione spoke first, with her head hung down, "Er, I, I won't insult Ginny anymore, er, and if you date her I'll still be your friend. B-Both of you."

Ginny said, "That goes for me too."

Harry smiled. "Good. For now I want us to be friends. If either of you starts fancying someone else, that'll make my decision easier. If you do want to influence my decision, do it by showing how good you are, not how bad the other is."

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The rest of the week went by quickly, and before they knew it, the three of them, along with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, were sitting at the trial of Lucius Malfoy. The Wizengamot had been shown the memories of the three children, and now Hermione was on the stand being cross-examined.

"Miss Granger," said Lucius' lawyer, Mr. Nott, "I can certainly understand how a muggleborn girl like yourself would like to feel important by putting a pureblood member of a highly respected family such as the Malfoys in Azkaban, but you can't honestly expect us to believe your testimony over Mr. Malfoy's."

"It's the truth," said Hermione firmly, "Mr. Malfoy planted a dark object on Ginny Weasley. I know for a fact that several other dark items were found in his house by the aurors."

Nott smiled, "The fact that Mr. Malfoy's former house elf, Dabby I believe, has been collecting dark objects and hiding them in Malfoy Manor was established. As soon as Mrs. Malfoy gave him clothes, he disappeared. If his disappearance doesn't prove his guilt in that matter, I don't know what does."

"What?" asked Hermione, "Surely you don't believe that ridiculous story!"

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After each of the kids had been treated like that on the witness stand, with Harry being told that he was probably delusional because of his scar, the Malfoys took the stand. Lucius and Draco were treated like royalty when it was time for them to testify, saying that the diary must have already been in the second-hand book when it was sold to the bookstore.

Fudge declared, "We have no need for a vote. Mr. Malfoy, a generous man who has donated to so many good causes, is obviously not guilty, and should be compensated for this unjust outrage that was caused by these attention-seeking troublemakers."

Mr. Malfoy said graciously, "That won't be necessary, Minister, as long as this matter has been taken care of."

"Minister Fudge," said Dumbledore, "As leader of the Wizengamot, I must protest your refusal to allow a vote."

"According to Article 347 of our charter, the Minister of Magic has the right to dismiss an unjust case," said Fudge with a smirk, "and I've just done it."

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It was with a heavy heart that the trio flooed back to Dumbledore's office. "At least we didn't have to travel with Draco," said Harry. "Did you see how he was gloating?"

"But how can Fudge be so blind?" shouted Hermione.

"It is my belief that Lucius Malfoy has just purchased the Minister of Magic," said Dumbledore. "I just don't know how to prove it."

Harry sighed, "I wish I could prove it, if only to wipe the smirk off Draco's ugly face."

At that moment, Dobby appeared in the office and said, "Harry Potter sir, you can be proving it! The goblins at Gringotts isn't talking to most wizards, but they is respecting the great Harry Potter, and they is hating the Malfoys, who is treating them like house elves while they is visiting their vaults! When master is bribing ministry officials, he is transferring gold directly from his vault to theirs. He is knowing that goblins isn't telling most wizards about it, but he isn't knowing how goblins is feeling about Harry Potter."

Dumbledore said, "Are you sure of this?"

"Dobby is sure, sir," said the unemployed house elf.

"Then, Harry, if you're agreeable, I'll teach you what I can about goblin customs tonight, and will take you to Gringotts tomorrow."

"Of course I'll do it!" said Harry like it was the easiest question in the world.

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The next day, Albus and Harry met early in his office. "Harry, did you remember your cloak?"

"Yes sir," said Harry.

"Put it on and we'll floo together. I don't want anyone to know you were visiting Gringotts."

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They went to Gringotts, and Albus requested a private meeting with the goblin he knew was in charge of the Malfoy family account, Floprake. Once they were alone in his office, Harry removed his cloak and put his hands together as Floprake watched in surprise. Harry

walked in front of the goblin and kneeled, looking him straight in the eye.

The goblin gave a small smile. "You may speak, Mr. Harry Potter. You are known to us."

Harry stood up and put his hands at his sides, standing directly in front of the goblin. "Manager Floprake, the Malfoy family has done much injustice, and you have it within your power to stop them from continuing. Mr. Malfoy has attempted to bring Voldemort back by endangering an eleven-year-old girl. He was caught and tried by our inferior courts, but was found not guilty. We believe he has bribed officials, including Minister Fudge, to accomplish this. I hereby request your help in the fight against Voldemort by providing me with official unchangeable financial records of his transactions here since the day he was arrested."

The goblin stared Harry in the face for five minutes before speaking. "We know that Voldemort treats Goblins even worse than the Malfoy family, and will therefore help Harry Potter." He clapped his hands together once, and a very thick book with a Gringotts seal appeared on a table in the room. "That contains every questionable transaction that the Malfoy family has done since Voldemort was vanquished. Since he claimed to be under the imperious curse before then, those records would be useless. I will agree to testify in court to the validity of these records. The public is not aware of the clause in our privacy policy that says that we do not protect the privacy of people we know to be enemies of goblins."

Harry put his hands together and kneeled again. "Thank you, Manager Floprake."

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After Harry and Dumbledore had returned to Hogwarts, Dumbledore said, "I must get this evidence to Amelia Bones. I'm sure she'll be able to match up dates of bribes with court verdicts. Thank you, Harry. You have accomplished what few wizards have done."

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Within a week, at breakfast, Harry was shown the headline of the Daily Prophet that said,

*"Minister Fudge has been bribed fifty times by You-Know-Who supporter, Lucius Malfoy!"*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*Official records from Gringotts Bank have been shown in court which contain proof that Lucius Malfoy has bribed the former Minister of Magic with millions of Galleons since Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, vanquished You-Know-Who, starting with the day before his story of being under the Imperius curse was accepted by the Wizengamot, clearing him of all charges of being a Death Eater. It has now been proven that he bribed Fudge yet again after Harry Potter caught him planting a cursed object that used to belong to You-Know-Who on a close friend of Mr. Potter.*

*Each of the transfers of Galleons from the Malfoy vault to the Fudge vault coincided with either the passing of a law that supports Death Eater philosophies or the rejection of a law that does not. The acting Minister of Magic, Amelia Bones, has stated, 'We are planning on reintroducing every one of the bills that were stopped by Malfoy, and finding way to repeal the ones that he got passed.'*

*Both Malfoy and Fudge have been arrested and convicted, and their families' wealth has been confiscated from their vaults, leaving the families only their ancestral homes. The gold is being redistributed among orphanages and victims of You-Know-Who and their heirs, including of course, Harry Potter, who lost his family on the day he vanquished He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named...."*

"WHAT?" said Harry with a laugh. "I suppose I don't really need the money, but I'm glad the Malfoys had theirs taken away." At that moment, a Gringotts owl flew to Harry while a very old owl Harry recognized as Errol flew to Ginny, who was sitting on his right. Errol fell onto Ginny's plate, ruining her breakfast, and getting syrup all over his wings. Harry chuckled as he retrieved his letter.

"Errol," shouted Ginny, "I ought to bat-bogey hex you. I hope my letter's not ruined."

Harry opened his letter to find that Gringotts had transferred 150,000 Galleons of Malfoy and Fudge money into his vault.

"Wow!" said Ginny excitedly, "Mum says we've been given 50,000 galleons of confiscated money for what Mr. Malfoy tried to do to me."

Hermione said, "That's great, Ginny!"

Harry said, "Yes it is! Congratulations!" as he pocketed his letter.

"How much did you get?" asked Ginny, watching him.

"Er, 150,000." Ginny and Hermione (who was sitting on Harry's left) gasped. "The letter from Gringotts said that every victim since that night gets 50,000 Galleons. It would be impossible to account for everyone who suffered before that time. Since my father, my mother, and myself were all assaulted by Voldemort; that makes three victims. Half of the money went to magical orphanages and the other half went to victims. They counted all the victims of Death Eaters since I was attacked, and divided the money evenly." He smiled. "Since the Malfoys and Fudges were very rich and there haven't been all that many attacks, they were able to give a good amount of money."

"I was hurt fighting You-Know-Who last year," said Ron.

"You were hurt by a chess piece, Ronald," said Hermione. "Don't get me wrong; that was a brave thing to do. We were going after V-Voldemort; he wasn't coming after us."

"Fine," Ron muttered.

At that moment, a very upset-looking Draco walked into the Great Hall by himself. He walked up to the Gryffindor table and glared at Harry and Ginny. "Potter and Weasley, I'll get even with you!"

Harry decided to gloat. "Maybe I'll buy myself a new broom with your father's money."

Draco glared at him until Hermione said, "It looks like you can't afford to keep your bodyguards with you anymore."

"I don't have to listen to you, you filthy mudblood!" He pulled out his wand and shot a hex at Hermione, who put up a shield in time. The red beam bounced off her shield and toward the ceiling, attracting attention from the head table.

"Fifty points from Gryffindor, and a detention for you Miss Granger, for performing spells at breakfast."

"Malfoy hexed her, and it bounced off her shield!" shouted Harry.

"Potter, you can't expect me to believe a second year can make a protego shield, even if she is an insufferable know-it-all!"

"I taught her," said Professor Flitwick from behind. "She was concerned about racists like Malfoy attacking her. I see that it was justified. If you didn't hear what he called her before hexing her, I suggest you see Madam Pomfrey to have your hearing treated! Malfoy will have the detention with Mr. Filch and Slytherin will lose the fifty points, while Gryffindor gains ten points for Miss Granger's perfect shield. Unless of course you'd like to check their wands first for proof of who did what!"

"Fine," spat Snape, and he turned around and walked away.

"Thanks, Professor Flitwick," said Hermione.

"You're welcome, Miss Granger. I didn't lie, understand. Since I taught Mr. Potter and instructed him to teach you, I did teach you, er, indirectly. As a half-blood who has experienced racism myself, I can't stand racists. I'll see you in class later."

After Flitwick had gone, Percy walked up and said, "Hermione, I never expected you to disgrace Gryffindor by being involved in an altercation with a Slytherin! You..."

"He attacked her, you pompous git," shouted Ginny.

"I should put you on report for that!" said Percy as his ears went pink.

"For hurting your itty-bitty feelings, Percy?" shouted Ginny.

Percy stormed off, his face red, after that.

“We should pull a prank on that git!” said Ginny.

Harry chuckled. “Sounds like a good idea to me. What do you think, Hermione?”

“Well, he does deserve it! Criticizing me for defending myself! That Slytherin marches up to our table, threatens and insults us! Then he tries to hex me! He’s as bad as Snape!”

“Well, then I guess we’d better come up with a plan for a memorable prank,” said Ginny.

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The weeks went by quickly after that, with Harry learning and teaching other ways of avoiding getting hit. His second lesson with Flitwick was on dodging spells. For his third lesson from Flitwick, he was taught the summoning charm, which he had some difficulty mastering. Fortunately, after two hours of personal instruction, he was able to summon any object in the room to block unfriendly spells. The plans for humbling Percy were still underway. They were waiting for his date with a prefect from Ravenclaw named Penelope Clearwater. That was going to be at his Hogsmeade visit in a week. For now, Harry was entering the headmaster’s office the week after occlumency lessons ended. He was looking forward to his first Voldemort lesson.

“Good evening Harry,” said Dumbledore. “Would you care for a lemon drop?”

“No thank you, sir,” said Harry politely. “I’m kind of anxious to start this lesson. I’ve been waiting months for this.”

“Yes, of course,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes. “You’ve worked exceptionally hard for this moment. I told you there was a prophecy. Now I’ll show you.”

Dumbledore walked over to his pensieve, which he'd left open, and stirred the contents until the image of Professor Trelawney appeared, saying,

*"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies."*

Dumbledore said, "Until the night Voldemort marked you with that scar, it could have been either you or Neville Longbottom, who was born the day before you were."

Harry took a deep breath. "It doesn't say if I'll win or lose. It just says I have the power to defeat him, a power that Voldemort knows not, and that I guess I'll have to kill him or be killed by him."

"Simply put, yes you are correct. Voldemort only heard the beginning. He heard nothing of marking you. When he learned of this prophecy, he decided to kill you and Neville as babies. Both of your families went into hiding. He came after your family first. I'm sure that he'd have gone after Neville next.

One of your father's closest friends, Sirius Black, turned out to be a spy for Voldemort. Their house was under the Fidelius Charm and he was their secret-keeper, the only one who could tell anybody where the house was. You may study the Fidelius Charm for the details if you like, or ask Miss Granger. Black told Voldemort where your parents were hiding, and you know the rest. The next day, another friend of your parents, Peter Pettigrew, was killed by Black, along with several muggles, when he was confronted. Black is being held in Azkaban to this day."

Harry was just sitting there quietly, absorbing the information the Headmaster was giving him.

"After you were taken out of the house by Hagrid, I had to come up with a way to keep you safe, and so I chose the blood protection that

living with the Dursleys could provide. Dumbledore sighed. "I believe that's enough information for tonight."

Harry, realizing that Dumbledore was finished speaking, said, "I guess I'll see you later," and walked out of the office."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 4 – A Day of Surprises**

The first Hogsmeade visit for students in third-year and above came quickly. Harry had begun learning offense now in his class with Flitwick. He'd been taught *expelliarmus* and *rictusempra*. Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Ginny were sitting at the Gryffindor table watching Percy. When he finished eating, he got up and walked over toward the Ravenclaw table, and tapped his girlfriend Penelope on the shoulder, and the youngest Weasley siblings got up and walked toward the couple. When Ron found out that they were pranking Percy, he wanted to help. Hermione had searched the library and found the perfect spell, but it required two people to perform it. It required about sixty seconds of the victims standing still while the hex was performed. It was decided that Ginny and Ron should be able to distract their brother that long while Harry and Hermione performed the spell behind Percy's back.

As Ron and Ginny were headed toward the Ravenclaw table, Penelope got up and started walking toward the exit with her boyfriend. Harry and Hermione got up and started walking while Ron called out, "Oy! Percy and Penelope! Could you come here?"

With an annoyed look on his face, Percy muttered something to his girlfriend and they walked toward his younger siblings. "What is it, Ron?" Percy asked with impatience.

"Well," said Ron. "You're going to Hogsmeade, right?"

"Yes," said Penelope.

"We, that is Ginny and I, were hoping you could pick up some things for us."

Percy sighed as his ears turned pink. "Why couldn't you ask Fred or George to do that?"

Ginny looked at Percy as though he was insane. "Would you trust Fred or George to get you something besides trouble?"

Percy smiled slightly. "I suppose not."

"We know that you're much more reliable and can be trusted," said Ginny.

Behind the couple, Harry and Hermione were having a hard time concentrating on the spell and not laughing at the way Percy was eating up the compliments.

Percy stood a bit straighter. "Yes, I certainly see why you would trust me over those two. If those clowns picked something up for you, they'd probably hex it to explode. They are so irresponsible! It's good to see that you two are beginning to respect the sense of responsibility that I have, but the twins rather lack. If you start following the rules better, I'll bet both of you could be prefects like me when the time comes. What is it that you've chosen to trust me to pick up for you?"

Ron looked over Percy's shoulder at Harry, who gave him a thumbs-up. "Ten chocolate frogs, and everything on this list of Zonko products."

As Ron was trying to put a parchment in Percy's hands, the prefect said, "I'll get you the candy, but I must insist that you give up the idea of those joke materials. You'll end up acting like the twins and get in trouble."

Ginny looked to the ground solemnly. "You're right Percy. We're sorry. We'll stop trying to pull off jokes."

"Yeah," said Ron. "I guess you two better get off to Hogsmeade. I hope you have a good time."

"Indeed we should," said Percy as he took Penelope's hand, "and indeed we shall." They walked away and out the doors while the quartet watched them.

Once Percy and Penelope were gone, they started laughing. "I can't believe that Percy is so thick he actually believed us!" said Ron, chuckling.

"With Ginny's performance, those repentant, sorrowful eyes, it would be hard not to believe her," said Hermione.



Ginny said. "Thanks. That was a brilliant spell you found, Hermione. How long before it takes affect?"

"About five more minutes," said Harry, chuckling. "You were all brilliant! I just wish we could go to Hogsmeade to watch them!"

Dobby suddenly appeared in front of Harry. "Harry Potter is wishing to go to Hogsmeade. Dobby can be bringing him and his Weezies and Grangy there!"

Harry was startled. "Er, Dobby. That's great. I'd like that, but, why are you doing this? I'm not your master."

Dobby shifted uncomfortably.

"That's a good question," said Hermione. "I mean, I thought before that you simply wanted Mr. Malfoy to go to jail, but there's more to that, isn't there? You only appeared when Harry said he wished he could prove Malfoy bribed Fudge. And just now he wished for transportation."

"Why are you granting Harry wishes?" asked Ginny and Ron together as Dobby squirmed more.

"I wish you'd answer my question," said Harry with a smirk.

"Well, Dobby is needing employment, and er, Dobby is hoping that Harry Potter would consider hiring Dobby for wages."

"Y-You want me to hire you?" asked Harry in shock as his eyes bulged out.

"Why would Harry want to hire a house elf?" asked Hermione. "He doesn't own a house."

"Pardon me, Miss Grangie," said Dobby timidly, "But Miss is mistaken. When Mrs. Malfoy is giving Dobby clothes, Dobby is fleeing to Dobby's friends that is goblins working at Gringotts. When Dobby is talking to them, they is telling Dobby that Harry Potter is having several houses, and they is wondering why Harry Potter never is visiting them."

“What?” said the four of them together.

“Are you sure?” asked Harry.

“The same goblin is telling Dobby about Master Malfoy’s bribes.”

“I’ll need to go back to Gringotts and ask them about it. “Anyway, how much money are you hoping for, Dobby?”

Dobby looked very apprehensive. “Er, a sickle per month, and, er, one day off every year?”

“That’s ridiculous!” exclaimed Hermione. “You should get at least ten Galleons a week, and weekends off!”

Dobby looked horrified. “Oh no! Dobby is not greedy! Dobby would be ashamed of having such wealth and being so lazy!”

“What’s the most that you would accept, Dobby?” asked Ginny kindly.

Dobby looked rather nervous. “Er, maybe, Dobby is supposing he is accepting one Galleon per week and one day off per month.”

Harry thought for about a minute. “Well, I’ll check it out with Gringotts, but if it’s true that I have all those houses, I should have someone keeping them from getting really bad. I’ll need you to take me to Gringotts today, and if that’s true, I guess you’ve got the job. But first, take us to Hogsmeade after I summon my cloak.

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A few minutes later, the group of kids appeared near Percy under Harry’s invisibility cloak, and started watching the show silently.

Percy and Penelope were talking to a Ravenclaw girl named Teresa. Percy said, “That’s certainly right, isn’t it Penelope?”

Penelope looked confused and asked, “Why’d you start mouthing the words instead of talking to me?”

Teresa said, “He wasn’t mouthing the words. You must not have been paying attention.”

Percy said, "I wasn't mouthing words, but Penelope was." He turned to his date. "Why were you doing that, Penelope dear?"

Penelope was getting frustrated. "I'm not mouthing words! And will you speak to me, and not just Teresa?"

Percy's cheeks were getting pink. "Will you stop acting like a child and speak up! Stop this foolishness!"

"Guys," said Teresa, "You're both speaking out loud! I think you should have Madam Pomfrey check your hearing."

The quartet was laughing as Percy and Penelope both argued that they could hear fine and accused Teresa of lying to them as part of a prank. Neither suspected that a spell had been cast that made the two of them unable to hear each other for five hours.

After they calmed down, Harry said, "Dobby," and the elf reappeared and bowed low.

"Yes, Harry Potter, sir."

"Take these three back to an empty classroom near Gryffindor Tower and then take me to Gringotts. I'd like to keep the cloak. Make sure nobody sees them."

"I'd like to go to Gringotts with you," said Ginny.

"Why would you want to do that?" snarled Ron, "so you can find out how much more money he has than us!"

"Actually Ronald," said Hermione, "I think it would be good to offer him moral support while he asks about his parents' possessions. I'd like to go as well."

"Whatever," said Ron.

"Are you girls sure?" asked Harry. "This could be boring."

"Yes," they both said at once.

Harry saw the determined look on both their faces and said, "I know it's pointless to argue with either of you. Dobby, take Ron to Hogwarts and then take the three of us to Gringotts."

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A few minutes later, the three of them popped into Gringotts under the invisibility cloak. Harry said, "Stay under the cloak until I get a private room. Stay close."

Harry snuck out from under the cloak when no one was looking and walked up to the counter. He put his hands together and said, "I am Harry Potter, and I wish to discuss my family's property in private."

The goblin behind the desk looked at him appraisingly for about thirty seconds before motioning toward a door and saying, "Go into that room. The one who handles your account is inside."

Harry walked up though the open door, waited thirty seconds, and closed the door. His friends emerged from under the cloak. They walked up to the desk where a goblin Harry recognized was sitting. Harry put his hands together and kneeled. The girls followed suit.

"You may speak, Mr. Potter," said the goblin. "May I ask the identities of your companions?"

Harry and the girls stood up straight and faced the goblin. "Manager Griphook, it is a pleasure to see you again. This is Hermione Granger, and this is Ginny Weasley." Harry indicated each as he introduced them.

Griphook stared at Harry and grinned. "You honor me, Mr. Potter. Most wizards don't bother learning our names. They seem to be under the impression that we all look alike. We have a Weasley vault, but unless I'm mistaken we do not have a Granger vault."

Hermione said, "That's correct, Manager Griphook. I'm muggleborn."

"I see," said the goblin. "How may I help you?"

Harry nervously said, "Er, well, I'd like to know everything I inherited from my parents. I've heard that I have a house, and I'd like to find out if it's true and where it's at."

The goblin chuckled to himself as he clapped his hands together once, making a rolled up scroll appear in front of Harry. "You actually own several houses. You also own three vaults. That scroll is charmed to give you whatever information you require that Gringotts has regarding your estate, and it is always accurate to the sickle. Pick up the scroll and say what you want to see."

Harry hesitantly grabbed the scroll and said, "My houses."

"Now unroll it."

Harry unrolled it and saw a listing of several homes with a location and photograph. The first one on the list was called 'Potter Manor' and appeared to be a mansion located about twenty kilometers outside of London. He had a cottage in Scotland near Hogwarts, as well as in Paris and Rome, to name a few places. He continued unrolling the scroll until he ran across the picture of a destroyed cottage labeled, 'Godric's Hollow.' His face paled as his hands began trembling. Both girls immediately put their hands on his shoulders as they gazed at the wreck that used to be a house.

"Roll it up, Harry," said Hermione. "There's no reason you have to look at that."

He looked up at Hermione and said, "I guess not," and rolled it up. He gave her a half smile to try to convince her he was ok. "My vaults," he said, and unrolled it again. He saw 'Harry Potter's Trust Vault,' which had nearly two hundred thousand Galleons in it, along with a picture. He then saw a picture of another vault that made the first one look empty. It had over one hundred million Galleons in it. It was listed as the 'Potter Family Vault.' The third vault was labeled 'Potter Family Valuables,' and it had a picture that had several things in it, but he couldn't accurately make out what they were based off of the small photograph. Fortunately, there was an organized list. The first category was portkeys. It appeared that there was a portkey for every house he owned. "What's a portkey?" he asked.

Hermione gave her textbook answer. "A magical way to travel wherein a common object is charmed to bring anybody touching it to its destination in seconds. They can be charmed to be voice-activated, time-activated, or touch-activated. Personally, I think voice-activated is the most convenient type, and I'm glad to see that's what they all are."

Harry kept looking down that list and exclaimed, "There's a portkey to the Shrieking Shack in here!"

"Who would want a portkey there?" said Hermione fearfully. "It's one of the most haunted houses in the world."

"My parents, that's who," said Harry without emotion.

"I'd like to go there," said Ginny excitedly.

"Me too," said Harry, "I'd also like to visit Potter Manor. I'd also like to find a better way to carry money." Harry then turned to Griphook and said, "Is there a more convenient way to carry money, both wizarding and muggle, than just taking a bunch of gold and pounds with me wherever I go?"

Griphook smiled. "Certainly, Mr. Potter, although most customers don't think to ask that." The goblin clapped his hands and a black pouch that had an ornate gold 'G' on it appeared in front of him. "It is charmed to always contain ten Galleons and one hundred pounds in it. As you remove money from it, it keeps on replenishing from your vault until it's empty. You're the only person who can open the pouch. If you wish to have it, we charge fifty Galleons."

Harry smiled. "Alright."

"Excellent. Which vault do you want it tied to?"

"Er, actually, could you simply combine both of my money vaults? I don't really see the point in having them separate if I can access both."

"Very well, Mr. Potter. We'll arrange for your trust vault to be emptied into the main vault. Do you wish to give up that vault?"

"Ye-hold on. Hermione?" said Harry.

"Yes?"

"Would you like a vault?"

Hermione's ears went a bit pink. "Er, I don't know, maybe. It would be nice to have a place to keep my money instead of my trunk. My parents always give me more money than I spend, so I save it. I would like it if you don't mind."

Harry handed Hermione his key and said, "Manager Griphook, I'd like it to become Hermione Granger's vault." He then looked at Ginny, who seemed sad, and said, "How much would another vault like that cost?"

Ginny blushed and said, "Harry, you don't have to..."

"Until I make a choice, I'm not going to favor one of you over the other," Harry replied quickly.

"One hundred Galleons."

"No way, Harry," said Ginny firmly. "I won't accept it! I'll never have enough money to justify it! If you insist on getting me my own vault, which you honestly don't have to do, make it a small one."

Harry sighed, "Alright. What other sizes are there?"

Griphook listed different sizes, and Harry settled on one for twenty Galleons that could fit the fifty thousand Galleons that Ginny had just gotten from the Malfoy-Fudge incident, with a little room to spare. Her parents had insisted that it was her money, although they didn't wanted her splurging it, so she thought it wouldn't be bad to keep it in her own vault. Griphook handed her the key to her new vault, and then asked, "Mr. Potter, do you have the keys to your vaults?"

Harry looked scared, "Er, no. I thought you had them."

"Not to worry, Mr. Potter. We'll just need a drop of your blood, and we can produce new keys, while at the same time causing the existing

keys to vanish. It's a service your family chose long ago, just in case they lost their keys. Anyone with Potter blood, which right now is only you, can use this procedure." Griphook turned to the girls. "If you wish, you may have this done for your vaults as well. It will only require a drop of your blood, and until you have children, you'll be the only ones who can get a replacement key."

Both girls agreed, so they all had it done. They would prick their finger with a type of pin and make sure to get a drop of blood in a small silver bowl. Griphook would say an incantation in what was presumably goblin language and clap his hands once, at which point the drop of blood was replaced by a key (or in Harry's case two keys).

They stopped by Hermione's vault, where she deposited twenty Galleons, and then went to the Potter Family Valuables vault. There were various beautiful and expensive things in there, but they didn't have time to spend there. Hermione noticed some books and asked if they could take them with, which Harry agreed to. He forced himself not to focus on anything but getting some of the portkeys.

They were all necklaces with a silver charm that had a picture of the destination carved on one side while a number was on the back. He handed each of the girls a portkey to one on the cottages and said, "I want you both to always wear this, so that you can quickly escape if you're ever in danger." They both reluctantly took it and thanked him. He found the Potter Manor and Shrieking Shack portkeys and put them both on, as well as one that he found that went directly to that vault.

"Harry," said Hermione, "there's a letter in a muggle envelope in here that's addressed to you."

"Really?" Harry walked over to investigate. He took the envelope from Hermione and opened it to find paper in it. It read,

*"My dearest Harry,*

*If you are reading this letter, then it means that both your father and I have died, but somehow you've survived. I left this letter in the vault so it wouldn't be lost. I've instructed Professor Dumbledore to give the key to this vault to you and Sirius immediately if we die. The first*



*thing I want to say is that we both love you more than we ever thought possible, and that if our deaths have somehow allowed you to survive, then we haven't died in vain. You matter more to us than anything, and our only regret is that we weren't around to watch you grow into a man.*

*We went into hiding to try to protect you from Voldemort. He has targeted you because of a prophecy that was given to Professor Dumbledore. If you don't know about it yet, demand that he show you the memory in his pensieve immediately! His heart is in the right place, but he has a habit of withholding information when he believes it is 'for the greater good.' I can't risk writing it down here, but it is extremely important that you know about it as soon as possible so that you can prepare! We've told everyone that Sirius Black is our secret-keeper, but that's not true. In actuality, Peter Pettigrew is our secret-keeper, and if we are dead, it may be that he has betrayed us. If that happened, then everyone may think Sirius was the traitor. If they arrest him, the truth should come out in his trial when they question him under veritaserum, but if the truth hasn't come out, then tell the authorities about this immediately! Sirius Black is a good man, and shouldn't have to pay for another's crime.*

*We hope that Sirius Black has survived, stayed out of prison, and raised you. If he has, then I'm sure he's already told you about us. I just want to make sure you know what your father was like from my point of view. When I first met him, I thought he was an arrogant git that half the girls at Hogwarts wanted to date for reasons that I couldn't fathom. He always was handsome, and even as a baby, you appear to have inherited that trait. I eventually came to know him as a good-hearted man who simply enjoyed pulling pranks on the deserving, usually Slytherins.*

*I used to try to defend him and his friends, "The Marauders," victims until one day he was picking on a Slytherin by the name of Snape. After I defended him, he had the nerve to call me a mudblood. I didn't admit it at the time, but at that moment, I realized that the bigot had it coming. Snape eventually became a Death Eater, although rumor has it, he's working for Professor Dumbledore now. I wonder what the Headmaster's playing at.*

*Anyway, after that incident, I came to realize that the Marauders actually were bringing justice to people that society was unwilling to punish. When people at school get into a fight, both parties are punished, no matter what it was about. People like Snape who strut around full of themselves insulting others who are only trying to help them deserve to have someone demonstrate that they're not as great as they think. I'll never admit it to your father, but I hope you do the same thing to people like them. After I realized what they were doing, I was more open to his flirting with me, and eventually went out with him. We fell in love, got married, and along came you. James loves you and I more than anything, and he would duel Voldemort himself for either of us.*

*I, on the other hand, have been more or less a bookworm. More than once I've been called an insufferable know-it-all. I've been accused of memorizing the entire Hogwarts library, but it's not true. There were many books in the restricted section that I didn't have time to read. At least a dozen. What can I say, I think knowledge is very useful, and I love learning. I hope that you inherit that trait, at least partially.*

*Your father says I'm pretty. Sirius and Remus should have photos of me, as well as your father and our friends, so you can decide for yourself whether I'm pretty. As a muggleborn bookworm who got the best grades in school, I was often the target of pranks by bigots, and when I started dating James Potter, their pranks only increased. Most of the time I was able to defend myself against those idiots who thought that they were automatically more powerful than me simply because of who their parents were. They didn't realize that studying and practicing hexes helps one to be very formidable, and allows one the pleasure of humiliating pureblood bigots.*

*Please take your studying seriously, but don't forget to enjoy yourself. I'll never understand his obsession over the game, but your father greatly enjoyed quidditch. Maybe you will too. I don't know how old you'll be when you read this letter, but I hope that one day you'll meet a nice girl (whether muggle or witch) that loves you as much as I love your father. I also hope that one day you'll know the joy of fatherhood, and understand how much James and I care for you.*

*I guess I've rambled on and on, but that's my privilege as your mother. There isn't enough space on this paper or enough words in this language to tell you how much your father and I love you, and I hope you love us too. I don't know what comes after death, but if it's possible, we'll be watching over you.*

*I will love you forever. Never forget that.*

*Your mum,*

*Lily Potter"*

Harry was weeping by the time he was done reading the letter. He hugged it to his chest whispering, "You are beautiful," for a moment and set it down. The girls read it together and were both silently weeping by the time they were done. They group-hugged Harry for a few minutes until Harry wiped his eyes and awkwardly said, "Er, sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry for loving your mum, Harry!" said Ginny.

"We're your friends, Harry. You don't have to pretend you don't cry around us," said Hermione.

"I-I need to show this letter to Dumbledore," said Harry with no emotion.

"Harry," said Hermione, "Do you know about this prophecy?"

Harry put his hand on his forehead and swore under his breath. "Yes, but I can't tell anyone about it. What I want to talk to him about is Sirius Black. Dumbledore told me he's in Azkaban right now for betraying them."

"Oh! They need to get him out of there," said Hermione. "I've read that it's an awful place!"

"I'll try to see him later tonight. Maybe I can ask him who this Remus person is while I'm there. If he's still around, maybe he can tell me about my parents. In the meantime, let's get out of here."

They left Gringotts and Harry called out, "Dobby." Dobby appeared, and before he could speak, Harry said, "You're hired!"

Dobby started crying. "You is most kind master. To complete our bond, you is shaking Dobby's hand."

Harry shook Dobby's hand, and there was a bright white glow that surrounded them for a second. "Do you know where my houses are?"

"Yes Master Harry Potter. Bonded elves is knowing where their master's homes is."

"Good. I'd like you to inspect the condition of each of the houses and report to me. By the way, could you not call me master? Just call me Harry."

"I is trying mas-Harry Potter. I is punishing myself for disob..."

"Don't ever punish yourself!" Harry said quickly. He then sighed. "If you feel you've done something wrong, tell me."

"Yes, Harry Potter, sir. Dobby is going now to obey mas-Harry Potter!" Dobby then disappeared.

"Well girls," said Harry, "I'd like to do a bit of shopping before we leave."

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They walked around Diagon Alley under the cloak except for when they were actually buying things, and it's a good thing too. At one point they walked right past Mrs. Weasley. Ginny nearly freaked out when she saw her mum, but Harry reminded her that they were invisible. After they were a good distance from her, Ginny said, "I wish I had a cloak like this." When Harry asked if she knew where he could buy one, she said she was kidding.

They went to a store that sold magical trunks, and Harry said to the saleslady, "What kind of trunks do you have?"

The dark-haired middle-aged witch glanced at his scar, and then at the girls, and smiled slightly. "Well, we have a wide variety. There are some that have five compartments, each charmed to be twice the capacity of a normal trunk. One of the compartments is longer so that a broomstick can fit in it. They're charmed to weigh ten pounds. We used to have them weightless, but it got unwanted attention from muggles. They're forty Galleons each. There are also options that can be added for more gold. We also have more advanced trunks, some of which can even be used as a furnished apartment."

Harry looked at his companions. "Would you like one of those?"

"If you're sure..." said Ginny.

"Of course I'm sure."

"Then I would."

"How about you, Hermione?" asked Harry.

"Well, it would help to hold my books..."

"Ok, I'd like two of those, and I'd like to hear about that apartment trunk."

The saleslady smiled. "Well, it's exactly like the other trunk, except that it has a sixth compartment. When you open that one, a staircase appears, and you can walk down into it to find a room. The cheapest just has the one room. A kitchen, bathroom, and as many bedrooms as you want can be added."

"How much for one with a kitchen, bathroom, and three bedrooms?" asked Harry.

"No," said Hermione.

"One hundred and ninety Galleons."

"Alright," said Harry, "I'll take one. You mentioned options," said Harry.

The witch, who was obviously getting commission, was now very happy. "Yes, we have security features that can hide the extra compartments from other people, so that the trunk looks like an ordinary one. We can also charm it so that only the owner can open the trunk. We can shield the trunk so that it can't be broken into by anything short of the killing curse. We can also add a feature that allows it to be shrunk down to a wallet. The first two options are five Galleons; the third is ten; the last is fifteen."

Before the girls could object, Harry said, "We'll take all the options on all three trunks."

"Excellent," said the witch. "That'll be three hundred seventy-five Galleons plus the ministry's six point seven percent tax. That makes it an even four hundred Galleons."

The girls stared at Harry as he said, "Alright."

"Excellent," said the saleslady. "Now all you have to do is choose the colors."

Harry's trunk was black, Hermione's was orange, and Ginny's was purple. Harry also chose the basic color scheme for the furnished apartment inside his trunk. He was going to have black carpet and furniture (the sheets and blankets for the bed) with white walls, but he let the girls sway him into choosing burgundy instead of black.

After he paid for the trunks, they each had to supply a drop of blood for the security charm on their trunk. When they'd finished that, each of them shrunk their trunk by grabbing the handle and saying, "Shrink." The trunk shrank into the handle, so that they were still holding the trunk a second later when it appeared to be an empty wallet except for an identification number and a request to mail it to an address if found.

"Muggle mail goes to that address. If anyone besides you is holding it, they'll get an overwhelming desire to return it to the owner, so they'll mail it here, and we'll contact you. By the way, you can bring the trunk back here to add any new features you decide you want."

After that, they went to Flourish and Blotts, where Harry stipulated that he'd buy each girl the same amount of books. Harry was amused watch Hermione keep trying to convince Ginny that she needed one more book. In the end he bought ten books each for the girls (including getting Ginny a copy of the book he was using in his advanced defense class), along with five books on defense for himself. After they'd put their purchases in their new trunks (and shrunk them back), they got ice cream cones at Fortescue's and took them out of site so they could enjoy them in peace. When they were done eating, Harry said, "I'd like to go to the Shrieking Shack now if you don't mind. It's near Hogsmeade, so we might be able to walk back to Hogwarts from there." He took off the correct necklace and said, "Grab onto this portkey." When they were all holding it, Harry said, "Activate Shrieking Shack."

They felt a pull from beneath their navels, and before long they had landed in a heap inside an old abandoned shack with broken furniture. They quickly got up and stood perfectly still, waiting for some horrid ghost to appear. After nothing happened for five minutes, Harry said, "I think it's safe to move. It doesn't seem like there's any ghosts in here at all."

"But people have heard screams coming from here," said Ginny.

"Well," said Hermione, "I don't know what caused the screams in the past, but nothing scary is in here now. There's a door. Why don't we try it?"

Despite how safe they said they were, all three of them had their wands out when they opened the door. They walked out, Harry in front, and walked down the stairs and followed a long passage. When they reached an exit, Harry poked his head out for a few seconds, and pulled it in fast. "We're under the Whomping Willow!" he exclaimed.

"Oh dear," said Hermione, "How will we get out of here?"

"I don't know," said Harry, "But if this passage was built here, there has to be a way."

"Of course," said Hermione, "The tree is a guardian of this passage. There has to be a way to stop the tree from moving so that we can exit safely! Harry, feel around for something to stop it, like a button."

"A button?" said Ginny skeptically.

"Do you have a better solution?" asked Hermione.

"No," admitted Ginny. "By the time we could cast a spell on the tree, we'd already be hit."

Harry moved his hand along the outside of the hole until he found a knot in the tree. As soon as he touched that knot, he noticed that the tree stopped moving. "This is it!" he said excitedly, "Come on!"

They got out from the hole, keeping an eye on the tree, just in case it moved, and walked out of its reach. "Well that was scary," said Hermione. "We should get back under the cloak before we're seen."

They successfully snuck back into the castle and took off the cloak inside an empty room. They walked into the Great Hall to find that lunch was still being served. Ginny said, "Fred and George are staring at us."

Harry and Hermione looked toward the twins, and they turned back to their plates. At that moment, Dobby appeared behind Harry and bowed low. "Dobby is inspecting mast...Harry Potter's homes and is reporting."

Harry turned his attention toward his house elf. "Hello Dobby. What did you find?"

"The houses is in need of cleaning and is having infestations of boggarts and doxies and such. Dobby is leaving from here to be taking care of it if Harry Potter is wanting Dobby to. The houses is being good as new when Dobby is finishing."

Harry smiled. "That sounds wonderful, Dobby..."

"Hey scarhead!" shouted Malfoy as he approached them. "What are you doing with my worthless house elf?"



The elf defiantly said, "Dobby is no longer working for the Malfoys! They is bad wizards! Mrs. Malfoy is giving Dobby clothes when Dobby is showing aurors the bad things they is hiding! Dobby isn't caring! Dobby is now working for the great Harry Potter!"

"What!" screamed Malfoy. "Bash your head against the wall for speaking to me like that, slave!"

"Dobby," said Harry politely, "Would you send Malfoy to the Slytherin common room?"

Dobby smiled, "Yes, Harry Potter, sir!" He snapped his fingers and Draco disappeared.

At that moment, Snape walked up and snarled at Harry. "What are you doing with one of the filthy vermin that work in the kitchens?"

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, Professor Snape," said Harry calmly, infuriating the greasy git, "Dobby is in my employ. He was delivering an important message to me."

"Is that so?" snarled Snape.

Snape stared into Harry's eyes, and Harry could feel his attempt at legilimency. Ginny and Hermione watched, fully aware of what was happening. While Harry stared fiercely back at Snape, the git's face was getting redder and redder as he was getting more and more frustrated. Harry smiled and said, "You'll have to try harder than that to read my mind."

"Fifty points from Gryffindor, and a week's worth of detentions!" shouted Snape.

"What for?" asked Harry.

"For your cheek!" growled Snape.

Harry calmly said, "No. I'm going to take this up with the headmaster. I'll show him this memory of your attempt to invade my mind in his pensieve and see who he thinks should be punished. Hermione,

Ginny, would you come with me as witnesses to see Professor Dumbledore?"

Both girls stood up with him and started walking toward the head table. "Fine!" shouted Snape. "I'll let you off, this time!"

Snape turned around and started walking away from them when Harry heard Malfoy's voice shout, "Tarantallegra!"

Harry wasted no time grabbing his wand and shouting, "Protego," as he turned to see where Malfoy was standing with his wand pointed.

The silver light that was coming from Draco's wand dissolved when it hit Harry's shield.

"Mr. Malfoy!" shouted McGonagall's voice, "I saw that! Fifty points from Slytherin for that disgraceful attack on Mr. Potter, and a week's worth of detention cleaning the floors with Mr. Filch!"

At that moment, Lockhart walked up to Harry and said arrogantly, "Excellent shield, Mr. Potter! No doubt you've been reading my biography, 'Magical Me,' and learned the shield from that book. I've been thinking about forming a dueling club, and would like you to be my assistant. It would certainly help your reputation here."

Harry stared at that idiot incredulously for a few seconds before replying, "No. No thank you professor. I'm not interested."

Gilderoy chuckled, "I can understand your nervousness about assisting someone of my reputation, but I assure you, I'll train you personally so you don't make a fool of yourself at the club."

Harry said stiffly, "You misunderstood me. I'm not interested in attending the club at all, sir."

Lockhart seemed shocked. He gave Harry what he thought was a threatening look. "If you feel that you have no need to learn proper dueling from me, perhaps we can have a friendly duel tonight. If you last for two minutes, you don't have to attend the club, and get fifty points extra credit in my class. If you don't, then you must be my assistant in the dueling club."

Harry smiled and reached out his hand toward Lockhart. "You're on."

The teacher paled, but nervously shook Harry's hand. McGonagall, who'd watched the conversation, said with a smile forming on the corners of her mouth, "Excellent! I'll make sure the headmaster reserves the hall for this. It should be most educational. Perhaps right after dinner."

Harry could swear he saw Lockhart's face turn blue. "Right then," said Lockhart, and he rushed out of the room.

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A half hour later, Harry was sitting in the common room with Hermione and Ginny when Fred and George walked up to them. "Where were you before lunch?" said Fred.

"We know you weren't on the grounds anywhere," said George.

"And then you came out of the Whomping Willow," said Fred.

All three paled. Ginny finally said defiantly, "How do you know that?"

"That's beside the point," said George.

"We just know," said Fred.

Hermione said, "You don't care that we broke the rules. Why do you...Of course! You want to know how we did it so you can try the same thing." The twins' ears both went pink.

Harry said calmly, realizing they wouldn't turn them in, "We went to Diagon Alley. Dobby, my house elf, took us there. I had some business at Gringotts and then we did a little shopping. That reminds me, I need to see Dumbledore." Harry got up and walked out the door headed toward the headmaster's office.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 5 –Sirius Situations**

“Hello Harry,” came the cheerful voice of Dumbledore from behind his desk as Harry entered his office. There was a twinkle in the headmaster’s eyes as he said, “Please sit down. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?”

“Sir,” said Harry, making sure to remain calm, despite the fact that he was hurt that Dumbledore hadn’t told him about his inheritance, “I’ve just been to Gringotts and found out about my inheritance that you haven’t told me about despite the fact that my mother asked you to.” He allowed a moment for that information to sink in as the twinkle left Dumbledore’s eyes. “I found this letter from my mother inside my family’s vault, and have questions about it.” Harry put the letter on the desk in front of the aged wizard.

“Well,” said Dumbledore, “You’ve had a busy day, and I understand it’s not over yet. Perhaps you could tell me why you snuck out of the castle to visit Gringotts.”

Harry sighed, making up his mind about what he’d tell the headmaster. “Dobby told me about my houses this morning. He asked me for a job. I wanted to confirm that he was correct, so I had him take me to Gringotts. I got to find out just how much money and property I own and visited the Potter Family Valuables vault. Among other things, I found the letter. I’d like you to read it and then explain why you never told me about this.”

Dumbledore picked up the letter and began to read, his eyes bulging out from behind his half-moon glasses when he read about Sirius. “I must get this information to the ministry. May I make a magical copy of this letter?” When Harry nodded Dumbledore pointed his wand at the letter, which glowed pink for a moment, and then an exact copy appeared next to it. Harry immediately took his copy and looked at Dumbledore expectantly. “What can I say, Harry? I felt that if you were aware of the resources available to you, you’d probably run away from the Dursleys.”

“So you specifically went against my parents’ wishes because you thought you knew better than them?”

The aged man appeared to be sweating now. "Er, yes." He sighed. "I made a mistake disobeying Lily's wishes, and a man has spent ten years in Azkaban without a trial because of it. I will turn give this letter to Acting Minister Bones. What I don't understand is why Professor Snape thought that Sirius Black was the traitor. He was working as a spy against Voldemort at the time. He seemed very happy that Sirius Black got justice without even a trial. Perhaps Voldemort was feeding his people false information."

Harry couldn't hold back. "Sir, isn't it possible that Professor Snape was lying to you and never really was on your side?"

The headmaster seemed shocked. "Of course not. I know that he turned from Voldemort. He felt bad about...something he'd done and wanted to make up for it. He saved your life last year. I know you have difficulty getting along with him, but you must look at it more objectively."

"Pardon me, sir, but I'm not convinced that you're looking at it objectively. I honestly think you've convinced yourself that you're right about Snape, and won't hear a word against him, no matter how much evidence there is that he's done wrong. For example, if he was sorry for what he did as a Death Eater, why does he still act like one in his classes."

"You surely must be exaggerating about PROFESSOR Snape."

Harry stared at Dumbledore for a few seconds. "Haven't you ever, as a concerned headmaster who's heard numerous complaints about your potions master, spied on one of his classes?"

"Of course not. That would be unethical."

"Not as unethical as subjecting students to Snape's teaching methods!" snapped Harry.

"I will consider your suggestion of inconspicuously observing my professors. Now I've got to deal with the fact that you have broken school rules. Why didn't you just come to me when Dobby informed you of your inheritance? I thought we've built a good relationship where you felt you could talk to me. Truthfully, the subject of your

inheritance has never come up in our conversations. I obviously didn't know about that letter, or else I would have visited the vault immediately after leaving you with the Dursleys. But answer me this. Would you have run away from the Dursleys if you knew about your houses?"

Harry's ears turned pink. "Er, yeah probably. I honestly was excited about the idea and asking you didn't occur to me since Dobby was already there. I'm sorry about that. At least I didn't skip any classes to go."

Dumbledore smiled. "I suppose that in a small way, it's partially my fault for not telling you about the vault, and you did come to me about it. You won't be severely punished this time, but I must warn you that next time I won't be so lenient. Ten points from Gryffindor, and you will serve one detention with Professor McGonagall. She'll inform you of when and what it is. Do you have anything else you wish to discuss?"

"Yes, a few things. Who is Remus?"

Dumbledore smiled. "Remus Lupin was one of your father's best friends. I've been thinking about asking him to teach here next year. I suppose you'll want to meet him."

"Yes," said Harry. "I'd really like to."

"I'll owl him and see if he's agreeable to it."

Harry smiled. "I'd appreciate it."

"You said there were more things you wished to discuss?"

"I'd like to visit Sirius Black, sir."

Albus raised his eyebrows. "I suppose I could try to arrange that. I'll let you know. Anything else?"

Harry looked down. "Er, I was wondering if it would be alright if I visited Potter Manor and my other houses some time."

Dumbledore stared at Harry for a few seconds before smiling. "I suppose if I say no you'll do it anyway. Dobby can probably take you there without my knowing."

Harry blushed but did not answer.

"I suppose a short visit to one house per weekend until you've seen them all could be permitted provided that it doesn't affect your classes and no one else knows about it. Just let me know in advance when and where you are going."

"Tomorrow after lunch I'd like to see Potter Manor. But would it be alright if I told Ginny and Hermione about it and took them, as long as they know it's a secret?"

"In other words, they probably already know about it and want to visit the mansion. I assume Dobby is taking care of the house now to make sure everything's fine there and it's safe?"

"Yes."

"Alright, but only stay two hours."

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Harry left excitedly, and then visited Professor Flitwick to ask any advice about his upcoming duel with Lockhart.

"Personally, I don't think he's half as good as he says he is," said Flitwick, "But don't underestimate him. Use everything I've taught you. Remember that if you lose you'll have to spend extra time with him."

Harry burst out laughing. "I guess you don't like him either."

"Not really. Have you chosen your second yet?"

"No. I didn't think about it."

"I'd like to volunteer."

Harry smiled. "Thanks!"

They practiced dueling until it was time for dinner. Flitwick taught him some particularly humiliating hexes, along with some serious ones.

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Harry walked up to the table and sat in the space that Ginny and Hermione had saved between them. Ginny immediately asked, "Where have you been? Some people thought you ran away."

"Practicing dueling with Flitwick. He asked to be my second."

"That's great!" exclaimed Hermione.

Dinner went by quickly, and then Dumbledore made an announcement. "And now we have some exciting entertainment!" A beetle flew into the Great Hall without anybody noticing. "Professor Lockhart and Harry Potter are going to have a friendly duel. Those of you not interested in watching are excused. The rest of you should stand against the walls for a few minutes while I turn the Great Hall into a dueling ring."

The students all got up, and soon there was a raised platform where the duel was to take place. Harry and Flitwick climbed the stairs on one side. Harry looked around and saw the bleachers full of students that had been protected by a shield the headmaster had conjured. Harry turned his attention toward Lockhart, who had just walked onto the other side of the platform, and removed his purple cape, throwing it at the girls who were cheering him on. He was wearing a shiny lilac outfit waving at the crowd with a smile on his face that didn't reach his eyes. Behind him, another figure emerged, with black, greasy hair and black wizarding robes. Harry was surprised that Snape would be Lockhart's second, but then realized that the greasy git would use any opportunity to curse him.

Lockhart cheerfully said, "Harry, Harry my boy. You still can back out if you want to. Nobody would think less of you for not wanting to duel me."

Harry responded by pulling out his wand. Dumbledore came in front of the dueling ring and announced with a magically enhanced voice, "The rules are simple. No unforgivable curses allowed, and the



dueling will continue until one contestant can't move or surrenders. The duel will begin at the count of three. 1, 2, 3."

Harry immediately raised a protego shield and began quickly moving around the platform. Lockhart had pointed his wand and said, "Stupefy," and a very weak-looking beam slowly shot toward Harry's starting position.

Harry wished he knew the bat-bogey hex, but settled for the one he'd practiced. He pointed his wand at Lockhart and shouted the incantation, causing Lockhart's robes to disappear, revealing him wearing nothing but pink boxer shorts with purple hearts on them. Harry ignored the audience's laughter. Lockhart's face turned red and he moved his hands to cover his underwear, and Harry sent another hex at his opponent. It was the leg-locker jinx. The famous fighter fell flat on his face in front of his twelve-year-old opponent. He pointed his wand at Harry, shouting, 'Stupefy,' yet again. His weak beam missed yet again, and Harry shot him with a powerful cheering charm, making Lockhart start laughing uncontrollably, dropping his wand. Harry summoned the wand into his left hand, and pointed both at Lockhart.

Harry shouted, "Do you surrender?"

The idiot professor tried to pick himself up with his hands, saying, "I've got you right where I want you. I'm warning you to surrender now, or you'll regret it."

Harry shouted, "Petrificus Totalus," making the imbecile go rigid.

Snape immediately said with a smirk, "As Professor Lockhart cannot complete this duel, I, as his second, wish to finish what he started."

Dumbledore shouted, "This duel is over! Professor Lockhart lost without hitting Mr. Potter with one spell."

"According to the rules, the second can continue it under these circumstances."

Albus looked older. "Very well. On the count of three. 1, 2, 3 go."

Harry re-raised his shield and moved quickly, but not quickly enough. Snape pointed his wand where he knew Harry would be and shouted, "Sectumsempra."

Harry felt the curse hit his leg and he fell, screaming in pain as he started bleeding. He pointed his wand at the sneering professor and shouted, "Reducto!" hitting the startled professor's wand hand, separating it from his body. Harry then pointed his wand at the furious git and said, "Stupefy," before he lost consciousness from loss of blood.

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He opened his eyes to see the blurry image of both Ginny and Hermione waiting with him. Ginny gave him his glasses when she saw his eyes open. Ron was also in the room, and appeared relieved that Harry woke up. He tried to move and felt a jolt of pain in his leg. He winced.

"Madam Pomfrey said you shouldn't try to get up until tomorrow morning," said Hermione, "and even then you'll need a cane for about a week."

"What happened?"

"You won," said Ginny proudly. "Professor Dumbledore jumped into the ring as soon as you stupefied Snape. He healed up the cuts on your leg as best he could, and then enervated that greasy git. Last night Dumbledore completely lost his cool! He was shouting at him for using that curse on you in front of everybody while Snape was still bleeding from losing his hand. Dumbledore fired Snape before he finally let Madam Pomfrey help him."

Hermione added, "Snape said he had the legal right to use any curse but the unforgivables in that duel and couldn't be fired. Dumbledore said he had a list of complaints by students and that that was the basis of his decision, not his attempted murder of a twelve-year-old boy."

"How is the greasy git, anyway?"

Ginny said, "She managed to reattach his hand, but because of how long it was separated, he'll never be able to use it as well as he used to, so he was advised to learn to write and duel with his left hand before he was sent to his quarters to pack. He left the castle a few hours ago."

"So it's Sunday morning then?" asked Harry.

"Oh, yes," said Hermione, "Sorry. We should have told you."

"Sorry about this," Harry whispered, "I'd gotten us permission to visit Potter Manor this afternoon before the duel."

"Don't be silly," said Hermione. "We can probably see it next weekend when you're better. That's what you need to concentrate on, recovery. I hope you don't have too bad of a scar from that curse."

Harry then looked at his bedsheet and picked it up so that he could look under it. He saw that he was in a hospital gown but couldn't see his leg clearly. He moved the gown up some. "Bloody Hell! My whole leg looks like I slept on a bed of nails! It's cut up all over!" he quietly hissed.

"We know," said Hermione, taking his right hand in hers. We saw it while it was still bleeding. Professor Dumbledore said that Snape invented the curse himself, and that it should be unforgivable. By the way, somehow the Daily Prophet found out about your duel." She handed him the day's paper and he read the headline.

*"Two Professors at Hogwarts Attack Harry Potter"*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*This reporter has witnessed something no parent ever imagined when sending their children to Hogwarts for an education. The famous Gilderoy Lockhart challenged one of his students, the young Boy-Who-Lived to a duel, and being the courageous soul that he is, he accepted. The duel was last night in the Great Hall.*

*Potter actually humiliated Lockhart, making this reporter believe that the achievements the famous author has claimed in his books, which,*

*by the way, no one has ever substantiated, were either false or exaggerated. The so-called-wizard showed no more talent than a squib while young Potter showed incredible dueling skills for someone his age. But after Lockhart was down, his second, a 'supposedly former' Death Eater that Professor Dumbledore has defended numerous times against accusations by students, as well as ministry officials who have wished to lock him up in Azkaban for his many crimes while working for He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, insisted on continuing the duel.*

*Professor Severus Snape started immediately with a dark spell that would've cost Potter his life had he not moved so quickly. As it is, he almost lost his leg. While he was on the floor bleeding severely, he managed to win the duel against Snape while he was gloating, injuring his wand hand and stupefying him before losing consciousness from his loss of blood. Immediately following this, Dumbledore finally did something to help Potter.*

*After stopping the bleeding and placing him in the care of the Hogwarts Nurse, the headmaster had an argument with Snape that ended when Dumbledore fired the man who'd tried to kill the Boy-Who-Still-Lives. Potter is currently in Hogwarts Hospital wing where he is expected to fully recover. After this display, I believe that we can expect great things from the famous Harry Potter. I do however wonder what future blunders we can expect from Professor Dumbledore, and which students will be in danger because of it."*

Ginny pointed to a table full of candies and cards near his bed. "These have been coming in steadily since the Daily Prophet came out. I just don't know how they knew about the duel. No reporter was there."

"Lockhart probably told them about the duel, hoping to get me to surrender in front of everybody," said Harry, "Where is he anyway?"

Hermione chuckled. "He seemed to vanish soon after he was released from your hex."

At that moment, Professor Flitwick came in and said, "How are you feeling, my boy?"

“Alright, Professor, except for my leg.”

“That was an awful thing to do to you,” said Flitwick. “But you still beat him! Very good show! Very good show indeed! But you should’ve let me handle him.”

Harry smiled. “No, I’m glad I’m the one who beat him, even if I do end up with a scar.”

Not long after Flitwick left, Dumbledore came to the hospital wing and talked to Harry. “I guess you were right. I was so sure of myself that I couldn’t see the truth about Professor Snape. Anyone who could use a curse like that against a child in a friendly duel is nothing more than a murderer. I’d believed he’d gotten past that life. I’m sorry that I refused to listen to anybody else about him. My arrogance almost got you killed last night. But I must say I was impressed by your dueling skills.”

“Professor Flitwick is an excellent teacher,” said Harry. “Thanks for getting him to give me those lessons.”

“That was my pleasure. It may interest you to know that due to Professor Lockhart’s disappearance, I’ve written to Mr. Lupin, offering him the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. I’m still waiting for his answer.”

“I hope he takes the job. Then I should be able to get to know him better. What about Sirius Black?”

“No word yet. I’ll floo Minister Bones next week if I haven’t heard from her yet. I’ll also give her your request to visit Mr. Black. By the way, since you’re obviously unable to visit Potter Manor today, you have permission to visit there either next Saturday or Sunday, whichever day suits you best. Just let me know in advance.”

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Harry was visited by many admirers and well-wishers that day, including the entire quidditch team, Hagrid, and many girls fourth-year and younger (which annoyed Ginny and Hermione, who were with him at all times, only leaving the Hospital wing one-at-a-time for

necessities). Harry gave most of the candy that admirers owed in to Ron. Hermione and Ginny (and himself) ate some, but there was just so much. Hundreds of people sent him so much candy that they would never finish it by themselves. However, he kept the cards from all the chocolate frogs. Monday morning, Harry got out of bed with some difficulty, and walked to the Great Hall with Hermione and Ginny, to be met with an incredible amount of applause from everyone but the Slytherins. Harry whispered to the girls, "I guess they're happy I got Snape fired."

"No you git, well yeah, that too, but they admire the way you handled yourself in that duel! You were incredibly brave and level-headed. We're certainly proud of you," said Hermione.

"Of course we are," said Ginny. "I would be clapping too if I didn't know how much you hate that attention. Take a look at Malfoy's face."

Harry obeyed and immediately burst out laughing. He looked like Dudley did when he didn't get enough birthday presents. "His father's in jail. His money is gone, and with it his so-called friends. His enemy is being honored. His favorite teacher is gone. He's not been having a good month."

"Hopefully he's learning that this is what happens to Death Eaters," said Ginny.

"But no one deserves..." said Hermione.

"Yes he does," interrupted Ginny. "His father should've been in Azkaban since he was one-year-old, so he's already had a lot of time with his father that he shouldn't have. He was born with money that he didn't earn, so he didn't deserve that. He didn't ever deserve the favoritism Snape gave him. He never had friends. He's enemies with Harry simply because Harry does the right thing. So Malfoy has finally gotten what he deserves, and I don't feel any pity for him. If this lesson in humility changes his attitude then that's great, but I'll never say he doesn't deserve what happened."

"I agree with Ginny," said Harry. "I'm not gonna pretend that he's some kind of saint or martyr because his family has finally gotten some justice. Just yesterday he tried to hex me from behind!"

"You're right, he does deserve it," admitted Hermione.

He sat between the redhead and brunette, much to the annoyance of the other girls, some of which shouted that they wanted to join his other girlfriends, earning a glare from both Ginny and Hermione.

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That week, Dumbledore taught DADA in Lockhart's place, while McGonagall doubled as Potions Master. They both did very well in those positions, making the classes much more enjoyable than they had ever been. Minerva actually explained what they were doing instead of just giving them instructions, so they actually learned more than just the recipe for the potions they brewed. Dumbledore surprised and embarrassed Harry in class by having him describe his duel from his perspective. He held them all mesmerized as he explained why he kept moving to avoid getting hit, and then how he knew he couldn't let Snape win. When he was finished, Dumbledore awarded him fifty points for Gryffindor.

On Friday night, Harry was summoned by Fawkes to the headmaster's office. He was happy to finally be rid of that cane as he walked up the stairs. His leg was scarred a bit, but not badly. When he got there, he was surprised to see that the headmaster was not alone. There was a man in obviously old robes with him. Dumbledore said, "Harry Potter, meet Professor Remus Lupin."

Harry's face brightened up at the name. He walked up and shook the man's hand, saying, "It's good to meet you sir!"

"It's good to see you again, Harry. The last time I saw you, you were one year old."

"Professor Dumbledore called you professor. Does that mean you'll be teaching defense?"

"Yes, Harry. I'd be a fool to pass up that opportunity."

"I've called you here tonight because Madam Bones has graciously allowed you to visit Sirius Black tomorrow afternoon, and Professor Lupin would like to accompany you if that's alright."

"He was an old friend of mine and your father's," said Lupin sadly. "I've never visited him because I believed he was the traitor."

"That'll be fine, sir. Is Sirius going to have a trial?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore, "in a month. Acting Minister Bones has already linked one of Mr. Malfoy's bribes to the day it was decided that Mr. Black didn't need a trial."

"When will there be a vote to choose the next minister?" asked Harry.

"In six weeks," said Dumbledore, "She wanted to make sure that he had a fair trial before the election for two reasons. One is that she could make sure he finally gets justice. The other is that she hopes that it will help her election campaign." Harry's face fell. "Harry, just because she wants to be Minister of Magic does not mean she's like Fudge. She wants to have the opportunity to undo all the damage that Fudge has done, and knows that she needs to win the election to do it. She simply hopes that there are enough voters who believe in justice. It wouldn't hurt if well-known people like ourselves supported her publicly. That is, if you do support what she's doing."

Harry smiled. "You're right. You can tell her that I'd be willing to make a public statement that I support what she's been doing. She deserves that just for what she's already done." He then turned to Lupin with a smile on his face, "So Professor Lupin, I'll bet you could tell me a lot of stories about my dad."

Remus chuckled, "I could, but I don't think I should tell the tales in front of the headmaster. He may change his mind about hiring me when he hears about the mischief we used to get into that we weren't caught doing."

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The next day, at twelve fifty p.m., Harry showed up at Dumbledore's office. He decided to visit Potter Manor on Sunday, and had made



sure Dobby knew so that he'd take care of any problems at that house first. He'd told the girls about Lupin and Sirius, and they were very happy about it. When he stepped into the office, he saw that Lupin was there with Dumbledore, and there was a pair of muggle handcuffs on the desk. Dumbledore saw Harry looking at them and said, "Don't worry, we're not going to handcuff you. That's simply the portkey you'll be taking at exactly one o'clock. I have to go through this checklist for you. As I said yesterday, you are not allowed to bring any portkeys, invisibility cloaks, potions, or other magical items with you. You may bring your wand with you, but you'll be required to leave it with the guard when you go into Sirius' cell. They are moving the normal guards, called Dementors, away from the immediate area around his cell, as they tend to ruin visits, leaving only aurors to make sure you make no attempt to break their prisoner out of his cell."

Harry had put his portkeys into his wallet/trunk, and left that in his regular trunk. He'd tried giving it to one of the girls, but the strong desire to return it to the owner kicked in and each immediately refused it, tossing it back to him before he realized what was happening. At the appropriate time, Harry and Lupin each grabbed one of the bracelets of the handcuffs and were whisked away to the most depressing place either of them had ever been.

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Harry got up off the filthy floor he'd fallen onto to find that his hands were dirty and his leg was starting to slightly bug him a bit because he'd landed on it. There were five aurors there with their wands out pointing at them. They were two wizards and three witches. They were wearing black robes with a badge that showed a magic wand in between two sheaves. They looked and acted completely without emotion. "Names and wands?" one of the witches asked.

"Remus Lupin," he said, handing one of them his wand.

"Harry Potter," said Harry as he handed his wand to one of the wizards.

"We were told you wish to see the prisoner, Sirius Black."

"That is correct," said Lupin.

One of them pointed his wand at Lupin and said, "Scan," while another did the same to Harry.

After they each glowed blue, they were told, "This way." Two of the aurors were in front of them and three were behind. The hallway was black without much to see. They passed a few cells where the occupants appeared to have lost their minds as they stared at the group that was walking. They didn't go far until they saw Sirius in his cell lying down with his eyes open. He silently turned his head to face his first ever visitors. While one kept his wand trained on the visitors, four of them pointed their wands at each corner of the door and sent a nonverbal spell at each one at the exact same moment. Then one of them took out a key and put it in the cell door, turning it and opening the cell. After Harry and Remus went in, the door was closed and locked again. "You have ten minutes," said one of the aurors. They all stayed nearby.

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Sirius Black knew the Dementors had temporarily left his wing. Briefly he wondered why, but then decided to try enjoying the few minutes of peace he was getting. He heard footsteps in the hallway but didn't pay attention until they stopped in front of his cell. He turned and looked at them. He recognized them, and immediately wondered if he was dreaming. His friend Remus had aged, but the boy with him looked almost like James had when he met him, maybe a year older. He squinted to see in the poorly lit room and could just make out the green hue in the boy's eyes. He knew who that boy must be!

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As soon as the visitors were in the cell, Sirius, with a scratchy voice that obviously hadn't been used for a while, said, "Remus Lupin and Harry Potter. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Remus spoke first, "Er, Sirius, Harry was just given access to the Potter Vault last week and he found a letter from Lily that said Peter was the Secret-Keeper, not you."

His eyes widened. "He did? Why didn't he go there before?"

Harry said, "Dumbledore never told me about my inheritance. He didn't want me to take my money and run away. He had no idea about the letter. I found out about my inheritance another way."

Sirius started laughing. "So the whole time I've been in this Hell there's been evidence waiting to be found that the great Albus Dumbledore didn't tell anyone about. Am I going to be released? Or has Fudge decided he doesn't care after he got more Malfoy money slipped to him."

"Actually, Fudge is somewhere in here, along with Malfoy," said Lupin. "Harry got evidence about the bribes a little while ago and now Madam Bones is Acting Minister. You're getting a trial next month."

Sirius nodded. "It's about bloody time." He then turned to Harry. "So Harry, tell me about yourself."

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They had a pleasant, albeit short, conversation with Sirius, and then the guards took them back where they came and gave them their wands back, along with a portkey to take back to Hogwarts. When Harry got back, Ginny and Hermione immediately accosted him with questions about Azkaban and Sirius. He told them all about his trip, and then they talked about what they expected to find the next day at Potter Manor.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 6 – Tours and Trials**

The recently waxed hardwood floor in the large room reflected the light from the magical chandelier above. The walls were painted a light shade of blue, and had wizard paintings of magical creatures, such as hippogriffs, dragons, phoenixes, and unicorns hanging on them. There were two navy blue recliners that were on either side of a matching sofa. There was also a large oval silver table in front of the couch. On the wall across the couch was a huge fireplace that could've fit four seven-foot-tall people standing in it. In between the table and the fireplace, a boy and two girls appeared out of thin air holding onto a necklace. That is, they were holding it until they fell to the ground in a heap.

"Ouch!" said Hermione. "That's my foot, Ginny."

"Sorry," the red headed girl replied while the three kids stood up.

The raven haired boy looked around in awe while hanging the necklace around his neck. He muttered, "Welcome to Potter Manor."

At that moment, there was a small 'pop' and Dobby, now wearing a small black tuxedo with a badge that displayed the Potter family crest on the left side of the jacket, appeared. He bowed to the ground. "Dobby is pleased to be seeing Mas...Harry Potter sir visiting his house! Dobby is hoping Harry Potter and his Weezy and Grangey is liking Potter Manor and they is finding it clean to their satisfaction!" he said excitedly.

"Thank you Dobby," said Hermione, "It looks lovely."

"Really great," said Ginny.

"Yes, you did a terrific job, Dobby!" said Harry.

Dobby started bawling at the praise. "Dobby is knowing of the great Harry Potter's kindness, but never has a wizard told Dobby he is doing a terrific job."

Harry looked at the weeping elf with sorrow over his former life. "Dobby, I don't know how the Malfoys treated you, but you're not

working for them anymore. I appreciate how hard you work, and when you do a good job, which I'm sure is more often than not, I'll say so."

"Mas...Harry Potter is too kind," said the weeping elf.

"So Dobby," said Ginny, trying to get past this uncomfortable moment, "Do you think you could give us a tour of the house?"

"Dobby is happy to be showing the house Dobby proudly is serving."

Dobby then led them to the dining room, where an antique wooden table and chairs in perfect condition stood on the navy blue carpet. The walls were painted white. One wall had a glass door that led out to a patio where there were two chairs with a small table. Harry could see a quidditch pitch outside.

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They had a hard time getting Dobby to show them the kitchen, since he proudly claimed they would never need to use it while he was working there. It looked much like a muggle kitchen, except that it was powered by magic. The refrigerator/freezer had freezing charms on it. The stove and oven didn't have knobs. Instead they were to be lit by magic. Harry said, "I guess I can't use this oven for five years. I'll have to get something else this summer if I feel like cooking. "Well, maybe I could use matches or a lighter. I don't want to get in trouble for underage magic."

Dobby said, "Harry Potter isn't needing to cook while Dobby is working for him, but Harry Potter and his friends can be using magic in this house."

Hermione looked at Dobby skeptically. "Why is that, Dobby?"

"Potter Manor is being a wizard home. The Ministry is only detecting magic, not who performs it. When the ministry is detecting magic in a wizard home, the ministry is ignoring it. That is being why young wizards like Draco Malfoy who is practicing hexes all summer isn't getting in trouble. The only time the ministry is giving warnings to underage wizards is being when the magic is being performed in a

muggle house where the underage wizard is living. That is being why only muggle-raised wizards, mostly muggleborn, is receiving warnings from the ministry. My former master Lucius Malfoy is saying that the law is for preventing the filthy mudbloods – his words not Dobby's – from practicing magic and to give the ministry an excuse to be expelling them from Hogwarts and snapping their wands."

"What?" said Harry, Hermione, and Ginny at the same time.

"Yes," said Dobby, "If Dobby is performing magic in Miss Grangey's house, then Miss Grangey is receiving a warning from the Ministry of Magic."

"That's interesting, Dobby," said Harry, "I'm gonna ask Dumbledore about that before I try it, though."

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Dobby led them to the library, which had blue carpet and wooden shelves full of books. On the other side of the room was a wooden table with four chairs. Hermione squealed with glee as she quickly skimmed over the titles. "It's too bad we don't have time to read some of these, Harry. Do you mind if I take a few of them with me?" asked Hermione.

"Er, sure. Ginny, you can take any books that interest you, too."

Harry briefly browsed the titles and found two books on defense that he thought looked interesting. He took out his wallet/trunk and put the books in it. While he was doing that, he saw Ginny put three books in hers. They both enjoyed watching Hermione trying to carry a stack of ten books that was taller than she was. "Can I help you with that, Hermione?" Harry asked while taking the top five books.

"Thanks Harry. I guess I should've only carried five at a time. Just leave it on the table." Both he and the brown-haired girl put their stacks on the table. "There's just a few more I need to get."

"How many are you taking?" asked Ginny with a smirk.

“Just sixteen,” said Hermione as she grabbed more books off the shelf. “I figured I could come back and get more when I’m through with them.”

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After they left the library, Dobby led them to a comfortable study with a wooden desk against three of the walls and a rectangular wooden table in the middle. There were three burgundy office chairs with rollers at the table. It had a burgundy tiled floor and white walls that had four portraits of people Harry didn’t recognize in them. They appeared to be asleep, and since Harry was pressed for time, he didn’t bother waking them.

They went up the stairs to find four matching bedrooms with tan carpet and white walls. They each had queen-sized beds with blankets that matched the carpet. They each had a dresser and reasonably big closet. There was also a small desk with a chair in each. One of the rooms also had a crib.

Then they went to the master bedroom that had a king-sized four-poster bed with burgundy bed curtains. The carpet and the loveseat both matched the bed curtains. There was an antique wooden desk with a matching chair in the room, as well as two matching dressers. The walls were white and had a few muggle paintings on them. There was a nice sized walk-in closet, as well as a connected luxury bathroom. (There was a regular bathroom on both floors.)

They took a quick walk around the grounds and saw a pavilion and a swimming pool in addition to the Quidditch Pitch they’d seen from the balcony, and then told Dobby goodbye and portkeyed to the Shrieking Shack. From there they walked to the castle, Harry easily touching the knot in the Whomping Willow now that he knew where to feel for it.

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Once they got into the castle, they went to see Dumbledore to tell them where they were, and ask him about what Dobby had said about the ministry detecting magic. The aged man turned a bit pale.

“Well, er, now that you mention it, it is true that the ministry only detects underage magic performed by muggle-raised, usually muggleborn children. I never thought of it that way, but you are right. It is a prejudiced law. I shall bring it to Minister Bones’ attention. Perhaps it should be altered to allow magic in front of people such as parents who are aware of magic, as long as it’s performed in the home. It could even possibly be limited to the spells Hogwarts teaches. That would allow the muggleborn students to practice their spellwork while on holiday. Perhaps it could simply be introduced as a bill to encourage studying. Yes, I shall definitely speak to her about it, and then I myself will write a bill and introduce it to the Wizengamot.”

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The next day they went to breakfast and noticed that there were two new teachers at the Head table. One was Professor Lupin, and the other was a tall, thin, blond-haired man with a short beard and brown eyes. He was wearing dark gray wizard’s robes. The Headmaster walked up to make an announcement about half way through breakfast (to make sure everyone was there). “Good morning everybody. I just wanted to introduce two new members of our staff. Professor R. J. Lupin will be teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts.” He motioned to Lupin. “And Professor W. P. Mathews will be our new Potions teacher, as well as the head of Slytherin House.” He indicated the other. “Well, have a good day.”

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The next potions class was highly anticipated. Everyone wondered what the new professor would be like, and whether he would favor his house the way Snape had. First years like Ginny hadn’t had him yet. As Harry and Hermione took their seats, Professor Mathews walked into the room. “Hello everyone,” he said with a smile, “I’m Professor Mathews. To begin, I’ll take attendance. When I read your name, raise your hand.” When he was through with that, he began his lesson. “Well, the potion we’ll be brewing today is the Swelling solution. Does anybody know what it’s used for?” Hermione about jumped out of her seat with her hand raised. “Yes Miss...Granger, I believe?”



“Yes sir. The swelling solution is a potion used to make whatever it touches expand in size like a balloon. In other words, the potion makes it swell.”

“Correct. Five points to Gryffindor.”

At that moment Draco Malfoy whispered a little too loudly at Hermione, “Filthy know-it-all mudblood.”

“Twenty points from Slytherin, Mr. Malfoy! Only idiots who support you-know-who use words like that! Miss Granger obviously knows more than you. Otherwise, you’d have answered the question! Your parentage won’t make any difference in this classroom, even if they’re not convicted criminals like Mr. Malfoy.”

“HOW DARE YOU SPEAK ABOUT MY FATHER!!!” shouted the spoiled brat.

“Fifty points from Slytherin and a week of detention cleaning the floors with Mr. Filch. The fact of your father’s conviction was all over the Daily Prophet. It’s hardly a secret now what he is. I hope you don’t follow in his footsteps, but given your display in this room, it looks like you will...all the way to Azkaban if you don’t change.”

The rest of the class went well, with the professor explaining why the ingredients of the potion worked the way they did. The Slytherins seemed deflated after they learned that Mathews wasn’t going to favor his house.

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The next Defense Against the Dark Arts class was easily the best they’d ever had. Lupin gave a practical lesson on some of the spells Harry had used in his duel the previous week. Toward the end of the lesson, Lupin said, “Due to the popularity of Mr. Potter’s duel last week, Professor Dumbledore has asked me to start a dueling club for those interested in learning how to better defend yourselves. It will start having meetings some time next week. I’ll give you more details at our next class. You’re dismissed. Mr. Potter, would you stay for a moment?” When everyone else had left the room, Lupin said, “Harry,

I understand that Professor Flitwick has been giving you advanced defense lessons.”

“Er, yes Professor.”

Lupin smiled, “When we’re alone you can call me Remus.”

Harry relaxed a bit, “Ok Remus.”

“From what Professor Flitwick said and Rita Skeeter wrote, you’re pretty good at dueling. Flitwick says you’ve even been tutoring a few students successfully. If you wouldn’t mind, I’d like for you to assist me in the dueling club. I’ll teach you the spells beforehand if you haven’t already learned them from Flitwick, and you can help me demonstrate as well as help students having trouble. I’ll make sure it doesn’t interfere with those lessons or Quidditch.”

Harry smiled at the professor. “Sure, as long as we can talk about my parents some.”

Lupin grinned, “You’ve got a deal!”

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Although Harry was a bit nervous about the dueling club, he got through it perfectly fine. Hermione was thrilled to hear about it. Ginny was happy too, but not nearly as ecstatic as the bushy-haired girl. As they discussed Lupin’s plans for the club, Harry and he soon discovered that he was planning on teaching almost exactly what Flitwick had, except at a less accelerated pace. Lupin decided to use Flitwick’s curriculum at half the speed. The first lesson was the Protego shield.

The weeks passed by quickly, with Harry, Ginny, and Hermione visiting a different house each week. None of them were anything compared to the manor, but were comfortable none the less. Harry asked if Dobby was sure he could handle all of the houses. “As long as Harry Potter is only using one of the houses, then Dobby has little to do in the other houses, so Dobby is handling it. Dobby is keeping the lawn trimmed and the house dusted in little time with magic. One

day per week Dobby is spending at all other houses. Dobby is going there, making everything perfect, and going to the next house.”

A week before the trial, Harry was walking along the halls when a crazy-looking woman with oversized glasses, whom Harry recognized as Professor Trelawney, was walking along looking slowly through what appeared to be a deck of cards, walked into him, dropping her deck of cards. Harry bent down to pick up the weird looking cards, saying, “I’m sorry professor.”

She said mysteriously, “It was inevitable that we would bump into each other. I...” All of the sudden she went ridged, and started speaking in a harsh voice as her eyes went unfocused.

*“It will happen tonight. The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these eleven years. Tonight, before midnight...the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was. Tonight...before midnight...the servant...will set out...to rejoin...his master...”*

The professor’s head fell forward onto her chest. She made a grunting sort of noise, and then quite suddenly, her head snapped up again. “I’m so sorry, dear boy,” she said dreamily.

Harry walked away as fast as he could, scared of what that could mean. He knew who the Dark Lord was, but that was all. He walked to Professor Dumbledore’s office and gave him the memory of what had happened. After he’d watched it in his Pensieve, the Professor looked fifty years older. “I see you’ve finally met the woman who predicted your birth. As far as who the servant is, I have no idea. It could be anyone faithful to Voldemort. Perhaps a Death Eater is going to escape Azkaban tonight. Regardless of who the servant is, the idea of Voldemort returning is terrifying. I suggest you work even harder on your defense lessons, for if Voldemort were to return, he would surely come after you. Let us hope that it takes this servant some time to locate his master.”

Harry told the girls about the new prophecy, and neither one of them knew what to say. Hermione tried to reason that it wasn’t real,

claiming she'd heard that Trelawney was a crazy fraud from more than one student, but Harry reminded her that Trelawney was the one who'd predicted his birth. Both girls were scared after that.

The next day, after a troubled sleep, Harry found it amusing the way that Ron went in a crazy frenzy trying to find his pet rat, Scabbers, who was suddenly missing, while it was a real possibility that a Death Eater was now loose and about to revive Voldemort. Harry had tried to console his friend, but Ron said, "Someone in Gryffindor Tower has a cat, and I'm gonna find out who!" A few days later, Harry found out that McGonagall had given Ron a detention for loudly accusing a first year boy of letting his cat eat Scabbers, bringing the poor kid to tears.

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Before Harry knew it, he was a spectator at the ministry (accompanied by Professors Dumbledore and Lupin) waiting for the trial of Sirius Black to begin. Dumbledore and Lupin both were to be witnesses during the trial, so they were called away before the trial began. Harry noticed a few reporters at the trial, as well as an attractive brunette middle-aged woman sitting alone looking worried.

A woman Harry recognized as Amelia Bones said, "We now begin the trial of Sirius Black, who has been held in Azkaban on suspicion of murder for over ten years without a trial. We will be using Veritaserum on all witnesses, and watching Pensieve memories of the events leading up to his arrest."

Harry watched as Professors Dumbledore and Lupin each testified that they had been told that Sirius Black was to be James and Lily's Secret-Keeper, but never witnessed them performing the Fidelius charm. Lily Potter's letter was then read for the court, and Sirius Black was brought to the stand. After Sirius was given Veritaserum, his memories were extracted and put in a special Pensieve that displayed memories much bigger than a normal pensieve, Harry watched what really happened.

First Harry saw Sirius talking James and Lily into switching to make Peter Pettigrew their Secret-Keeper. Then he saw Black watching the Fidelius charm being placed on the property of Godric's Hollow. Then

he saw Sirius arriving at the house after Voldemort had attacked, unsuccessfully asking Hagrid to give him baby Harry. Finally he saw Black confront Pettigrew. He saw the traitor yelling accusations at Sirius. He winced as he watched Peter cut off his own finger. He watched the murderer split the sidewalk with a spell, and then he saw the man change into a rat. Harry's heart stopped in that brief moment before the rat jumped down into the sewer. He'd recognize that rat anywhere. It looked like Ron's rat, Scabbers. He thought about it, the way that the rat was missing a toe and how it had been in Ron's family for years until it went missing...just before he knew Sirius would have his trial, the night he'd been given that prophecy. Now he knew who the servant was - Peter Pettigrew.

Harry was too deep in thought to pay much attention to the rest of Black's testimony, or the procedure for coming to a decision. He was paying attention however, when the verdict was given. Madam Bones declared, "Sirius Black has been cleared of all charges, and is to be compensated 110,000 Galleons for his unlawful imprisonment – 10,000 for every year he was held."

Harry grinned ear to ear upon hearing that verdict, his conclusion about Pettigrew temporarily put aside. He ran up to his godfather, sticking out his hand to shake it. Instead, Black pulled Harry into a hug. "I can't thank you enough, Harry! If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been in there for life!"

Suddenly, Harry felt a hand on his shoulder and heard a familiar voice saying, "Harry, I think now would be an excellent opportunity for you to publicly show support for Madam Bones. There are several reporters here, after all."

Harry turned around and saw Dumbledore. "Alright. But there's something we need to talk about in your office tonight."

"Very well." Dumbledore then turned toward the crowd, where Harry saw Sirius talking to the brunette woman he'd noticed earlier, and loudly said, "For anyone who's interested, Harry Potter has something to say." He then held his wand to Harry's throat.

Harry's face turned pink. "Er, I'd like to thank Amelia Bones, our acting Minister of Magic, for her commitment to justice that not only

saw the guilty, such as Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Fudge, punished for their crimes, but has also made sure that the innocent, such as Sirius Black, have had a fair trial. She has my full support, and I encourage all of you to vote for her to become the next Minister of Magic.”

Madam Bones looked at Harry in shock, with a smile forming on her face while Dumbledore pulled his wand away from Harry’s throat and onto his. “I concur with Mr. Potter. If you are interested in truth and justice, you cannot find a better leader than Amelia Bones.”

Harry looked around at the press, and saw them all taking notes furiously and running toward him. “Er, professor,” Harry said to Dumbledore, “I think we need to go before the reporters trample us.”

“Right you are, my boy. Right you are.” He quickly guided Harry past the reporters and out the door, with Remus and Sirius right behind them. When they finally got to a fireplace they could floo to Hogwarts from, they were all breaking a sweat.

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They arrived at Hogwarts in Dumbledore’s office, and the headmaster said to Harry, “Is what you wanted to discuss private, or can you speak of it in front of Sirius and Professor Lupin?”

Harry wasn’t sure. “Er, it’s about what happened last week. I know who it was about.”

Dumbledore looked surprised. “Well, I don’t see much point in keeping that particular prophecy a secret. It’s something we all must prepare for. Mr. Potter bumped into Professor Trelawney last week and she made a real prophecy. Mind you, she’s unaware of it when she makes them, and I ask that you not tell her about it. Let me show it to you in the pensieve.”

After they’d all seen the prophecy, Harry said, “The servant was Ron Weasley’s rat, Scabbers.” A look of confusion came upon Albus’ face while a look of comprehension dawned on the two Marauders. “I saw Pettigrew change into a rat in Sirius’ memory, and immediately recognized it as the rat I’ve shared a dorm with for over a year. Scabbers has been with the Weasleys for ages. He used to belong to

Percy. He's even missing a toe. Anyway, Scabbers was missing the morning after that prophecy was given, and Ron hasn't seen him since."

"It makes sense," said Lupin, "He wouldn't want to be around once he heard about Sirius' trial. He knew he'd be implicated, and that everyone, including Harry, would know he was an animagus. If he weren't missing, what would we be doing right now?"

"KILLING THAT TRAITOR!!!" shouted Sirius. His face was red with anger.

Dumbledore sighed. "As it is, I'm sure he's long gone. Unfortunately, all we can do is wait to see what happens."

There was about a minute of silence then, which Harry broke by saying, "Sirius, who was that woman you were talking to after the trial?"

Sirius' ears turned pink. "Her name is Angela Harper. She works for the Ministry's department of games and sports. She used to be a professional Quidditch chaser. Er, she was my fiancé, well, before...it happened. She obviously didn't just wait for me after I'd been arrested, but she recently broke up with her boyfriend. She said that she's willing to start all over with me now that she knows I'm not guilty."

Harry grinned, "Sounds great!"

Sirius grinned evilly at his godson. "Maybe, but I hear you're doing better. What's this Moony tells me about you and two girls?"

Harry's face went scarlet as his head went down. "I'm...er...not...dating...either! We're...er...just...friends!"

"Sure you are," Sirius said with a wink.

After much argument between Sirius and Dumbledore, it was decided that Sirius would apply to be Harry's magical guardian while leaving the Dursleys as his nonmagical guardians. Harry would still live with the Dursleys for six weeks per year to maintain the blood protection,

and with Sirius (or staying at a friend's house like the Weasleys) for the rest of the time he wasn't at Hogwarts. Sirius mentioned going to his house, sounding depressed about it, but Harry said, "I insist we live at Potter Manor!" He then called Dobby and introduced Sirius to him. Sirius insisted that Harry get the master bedroom since it is his house, saying he'd take his old room. Harry made plans to spend Christmas break at Potter Manor with Sirius and Remus.

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A week later, it was Halloween, which would've meant a wonderful feast, if Nearly-Headless Nick hadn't talked Harry into attending his Deathday party, a thoroughly unpleasant experience that Harry would rather forget. When he'd told the girls about it, Ginny had absolutely refused to go. By the time Harry and Hermione had left the party, they felt Ginny had been correct.

The first Quidditch match of the season was soon after that. Many of the Slytherin players had old brooms, so the Gryffindors dominated the game, despite the attempts at cheating. Harry easily caught the snitch, and the score ended up 240 to 90. That was the same day that the news arrived that Amelia Bones had won the election for Minister of Magic by a landslide.

The term progressed quickly, with Harry getting better and better at defense thanks to Professor Flitwick's efforts, Harry's teaching the girls those lessons, and his help in the dueling club. On the last day of term, the front page of the Daily Prophet had an announcement that every student was excited about.

*"New Law Allows Underage Magic for Educational Purposes*

*In a surprise move, Minister Amelia Bones has just approved a new law proposed by Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore that allows Hogwarts students to practice magic inside their homes, as long as it's not in front of muggles who are unaware of us...."*

The article went on to say that since the Ministry is unable to track underage magic done in wizarding homes, the previous law was a blatant attempt to give muggleborn students a disadvantage in their education. The day progressed with exams in every class, which



Harry felt he'd done well in, and finally after supper, Harry packed for his trip home. He decided to give his old trunk to Ron (whose very old trunk originally belonged to Bill), so he finally packed up all his stuff into his wallet/trunk, said goodbye to his friends, inviting Hermione, Ginny, and Ron to visit him. Then he walked to Professor Lupin's office. Since Harry had the portkey to Potter Manor, they'd been given permission to go there tonight. Lupin had his luggage ready, so they took the portkey back to Potter Manor, for what would be a memorable holiday.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 7 – Christmas Break**

As Harry and Remus appeared inside Potter Manor, they received a shock. Sitting/laying on the navy blue sofa snogging each other senseless were what appeared to be Sirius and a brunette woman that Harry believed was Angela Harper, although he couldn't see their faces to know for sure. They didn't react to the new arrivals at all, so Moony signaled for Harry to be quiet as he conjured a gallon bucket of water. He tiptoed up to the couple while Harry kept his hands over his mouth to stop himself from laughing.

"WHAAA?" shouted Sirius and Angela at the same moment, as their faces and upper bodies were dripping with cold water. Remus was standing there with an empty bucket laughing his head off as Harry, whose face was red from holding back his laughter, finally started cracking up.

Angela glared at Remus until Sirius started laughing. "I guess we sort of lost track of time," Padfoot said. "Um, I wanted to introduce Angela properly to Harry. Er, Harry Potter, this is Angela Harper."

"Actually," said the smiling brunette, "I knew you as a baby, Harry, before you were famous. You were adorable. What happened?"

"I laughed after Moony poured water all over you," said Harry grinning, "That probably made me look ugly to you." He grinned evilly. "Either that or you need glasses, cause I'm still adorable."

"He's got two girlfriends at Hogwarts," said Sirius, winking at his godson, "so he must be."

Harry's face involuntarily smiled as embarrassment took away his power of speech. "They....are....not....my....girlfriends!"

"Only two girlfriends?" asked Angela, "I should think someone as famous as you would have at least five."

"Oh, I've seen other girls volunteering to join his entourage," said Lupin with a smirk, "But Harry seems content with only two."

“WE’RE JUST FRIENDS!” the red-faced, raven-haired boy shouted as he started marching on the wood floor in the direction of his bedroom.

When he slammed the door behind him, the three adults started laughing until Remus said, “I think we should probably go apologize. He may stay in that room until the break is over otherwise.”

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Harry went into his bedroom, slammed the door, and fell on his bed. Remembering he could do magic, he pointed his wand at the door and magically locked it. ‘Sure,’ he thought to himself, ‘we’ve talked about dating, but I’m not dating either of them. I shouldn’t have to put up with harassment if I don’t get to kiss them! Besides, I still don’t know which one I like better!’

Suddenly there was a small pop in his room. Harry turned and saw Dobby running at him with his arms open wide. “Harry Potter is home for Christmas!” the elf proclaimed as he hugged his master.

Harry smiled as he returned the hug. “It’s good to see you Dobby!”

“Harry Potter is saying it is good to see Dobby,” the elf cried, “Never before has a wizard said it is good seeing Dobby! Harry Potter is a great wizard!”

At that moment there was a knock outside Harry’s door, and Sirius’ voice called out. “We’re sorry for harassing you, Harry. We didn’t mean it.”

“We’re just happy that you have such close friends, and we wouldn’t be at all surprised if you end up dating one or both of them,” said Remus.

“Harry,” said Angela’s voice, “I’m sorry. We’ve just met and I had to join in harassing you. I hope we can be friends. I for one promise not to harass you about your friends for the rest of your Christmas break. Please come out. We’d like to hear about your term. I’d especially like to hear about the quidditch matches. I understand you’re the Gryffindor Seeker. I heard your team slaughtered Slytherin.”

He smiled at that memory, and released the door. They made their way downstairs talking about Hogwarts. Angela herself was on the Gryffindor quidditch team at the same time as James Potter. They were chasers together. She told a lot of stories about pranks James pulled on Slytherin quidditch players, which Harry very much enjoyed.

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Time passed very quickly until Harry was going to bed on December 23rd after a day of Christmas shopping in Diagon Alley with Remus, Sirius, and Angela. Harry hadn't gotten any Christmas presents for anyone before then. He hoped everyone, especially Hermione and Ginny, would like what he bought them. He drifted off to sleep and enjoyed happy dreams about quidditch. He was playing a game and looking for the snitch. He squinted, looking all over the pitch until he spotted it. As he started flying toward the snitch, he noticed another one next to it. The closer he got, he saw that each of the snitches had a face on it. One was Hermione, and the other was Ginny. He was staring at them both, trying to decide which one to catch, when his dream got interrupted and turned into the worst nightmare he'd ever had so far.

"So, Wormtail," hissed the voice Harry had heard coming from the back of Quirrel's head just six months before, "have you milked Nagini yet?"

"Y-Yes my lord," said a pitiful man Harry recognized as Peter Pettigrew as he bowed to the floor. "I've prepared everything you need tonight my master."

"Have you received word from my other servant?" hissed Voldemort as Harry watched from behind Voldemort's eyes, "Is he preparing the potion that will aid in his capturing of Harry Potter?"

"Y-Yes my lord," said Pettigrew, "But why do you need the boy? Apprehending him will be difficult, even with the potion. We could use another wizard's blo..."

"ANOTHER WIZARD?" shouted Riddle, "I will not use another! I want to be more powerful when I return! I want to be able to get past the protection within the boy!"

At that moment, a huge snake slithered into the room and hissed at its master. Harry understood it to say, "There is an old muggle standing outside this door watching, master."

Voldemort said, "Nagini tells me that someone is listening to our conversation. Wormtail, open the door and invite him inside."

"Y-yes my master," said Peter, as he walked over toward the door and opened it, revealing an old man.

Voldemort looked at him from the chair that was facing the door. His pointed his wand and said, "Avada Kadavra!"

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Harry woke up screaming with his scar feeling as though it were on fire. Dobby immediately appeared with a wet cloth and said, "Thank goodness Harry Potter is awake! Dobby is hearing Harry Potter screaming in his sleep. Dobby is coming in Harry Potter's room and is seeing Harry Potter sweating as he is thrashing about in his sleep. Dobby is getting a cold cloth for Harry Potter's head. Here." He finally handed Harry the damp cloth, which Harry used to wipe the sweat off his face before rubbing it on his scar.

"Th-thanks Dobby," said Harry as his heart rate slowed down.

He soon heard knocking at his door. "Harry, are you alright?" said Sirius.

"I-I'm fine. You can come in." After Sirius had walked into the room, Harry said, "I just had a...I don't know. I was dreaming, but then the dream was interrupted. I was suddenly Voldemort, and I was talking with Wormtail, planning my abduction from Hogwarts. I woke up with my scar hurting terribly. It's getting better now though."

Sirius paled as his eyes flicked toward the lightning-shaped scar, which did appear a bit pink. "Tell me everything you remember about it."

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After Harry had told the Voldemort dream to Sirius, leaving out his previous dream, his godfather had him write the whole thing down in a letter and let Dumbledore know about it. The next morning, they told Lupin about it as well. He suggested that, "The scar you received from Voldemort may somehow be a link between him and yourself. I hope not, because if that's true, Peter has found Voldemort, and is helping him, as well as planning to do you harm."

"Yes," said Sirius, "I highly doubt that Voldemort wants to kidnap you to have a cup of tea and talk about old times."

"It sounded like he wants my blood," said Harry.

"Well," said Sirius, putting a hand on Harry's shoulder, "We'll just have to make sure he doesn't get it."

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The rest of the day flew by, waiting for a response from Albus. When it finally arrived very late, it promised extra security at Hogwarts, courtesy of Minister Amelia Bones. The headmaster only told her that he had reason to believe Voldemort was on the move and might be planning on attacking Harry. He told her nothing of Harry's dream.

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Harry woke up on Christmas morning and went hurriedly downstairs to open presents. He found a present from Sirius, Remus, Dobby, and Angela, who were already downstairs waiting for him. The Grangers, the Weasleys, and one of Sirius' cousins were coming over for lunch, and they were planning on exchanging gifts then. After wishing each other a Happy Christmas, Harry and the others started opening their presents. Dobby had given him a mismatched pair of socks. One was green and had small broomsticks on it; the other was red and had small snitches on it. Harry blushed slightly at this, remembering his dream. He looked up at Dobby and said, "Er, thanks!"

Dobby beamed at him. "Dobby is loving socks because Mistress Malfoy is giving Dobby socks when she is dismissing him. Dobby is

hoping Harry Potter is liking socks so Dobby is hand knitting them for Harry Potter.”

He smiled at Dobby, faking enthusiasm. “I love them Dobby,” he said, putting them on his bare feet. Dobby gave the others socks suited to their personalities as well. Lupin gave Harry a miniature foe glass that would hopefully help him to know when someone was approaching him with ill intentions. Angela gave him a golden snitch signed by the English national team’s Seeker.

“Thanks a lot, Angela!” said Harry smiling at her. He looked down. “My gift for you isn’t all that special. I’m sor...”

“Don’t say you’re sorry, Harry,” the brunette said with a smile, “Give me a hug instead.” Harry complied. He had bought her some perfume that Sirius had informed him was her favorite.

When he opened the gift from Sirius, he was stunned. It was a long rectangular case that held a broomstick he’d never heard of, called the Firebolt, along with a manual. Sirius said, “It’s the newest broom out there, even better than the Nimbus 2001s. It’s not even at the stores yet. I’ve got a friend who works in management at the company that makes them who let me buy it early. I think they believe Harry Potter’s endorsement will help their sales. They believe that it will become the international Quidditch standard broom before long. You’ll be able to out-fly anybody at Hogwarts with this broom. I also bought a dozen cleansweeps and a Quidditch ball set for the pitch here. They’re in a broom shed I had Dobby put near it. It’s not so cold that a warming charm wouldn’t let us be comfortable in a match, so I’m hoping to convince our lunch guests to play.”

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Harry spent most of the morning reading the Firebolt’s manual outside by the Quidditch pitch (with a warming charm), trying out every feature as he read about it. He’d put his signed snitch in the display case in his room because he didn’t want to risk losing it and was practicing catching the snitch from the regular set of balls that he found in the shed along with the new brooms. He left his Firebolt in there when he was called in for lunch.

When he arrived, he was immediately tackled by Hermione, who hugged him tightly, saying, "I missed you."

He smiled at her. "I missed you too Hermione. Happy Christmas."

"Oh yeah," she said blushing, "Happy Christmas."

When she released him, he saw that Ginny, along with Ron, Fred, and George, was also there. The redheaded girl tackled Harry the same way Hermione did, saying, "Happy Christmas Harry! I missed you so much!"

"Me, too. Happy Christmas."

Harry saw the satisfied looks on Angela and the two Marauder's faces as they watched him hug both girls, and decided to change the topic. He looked around and saw a woman who appeared to be about twenty years old with blue eyes and pink hair. "Hello," Harry said to her, "I don't believe we've met. I'm Harry."

"Wotcher Harry, it's good to meet you. I'm Sirius' favorite cousin. You can call me Tonks," she said, shaking his hand, "Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas, Tonks."

"Tonks is now half way through the three-year auror training program," said Sirius proudly.

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After a splendid lunch, they exchanged gifts. Harry had made sure to spend the same amount on both of the girls. He bought Ginny a bottle of expensive perfume, along with a book on Quidditch Chaser strategies. He'd written, 'Ginny, you really are an excellent Chaser! I hope you try out for the team next year!' on the inside cover.

Ginny hugged him after reading that. "Thank you so much, Harry! That means a lot to me!" She then kissed his cheek.

Harry gave Hermione a bottle of the same perfume he gave Ginny, along with a book on magical healing. On the inside cover of that



book, Harry had written, 'Hermione, you are brilliant and could do well studying anything. I just thought I'd make a suggestion that you become a healer because when I get hurt, I'd feel safer under your care than anyone else's, even Madam Pomfrey's. I think it would be a great way to help people, which I know you want to do.' Hermione hugged him and kissed him on the cheek (so she wasn't outdone by Ginny).

Each of the girls had provided Harry with a picture of them (Hermione's had a nicer frame, which Harry noted irritated Ginny) along with a pair of Quidditch gloves from Ginny and a book on Seeker moves from Hermione.

Harry bought Ron a memory-orb that displayed a half-hour of exciting professional Quidditch plays when you touched it and said the word, 'display,' which he absolutely loved, and gave some chocolate frogs to the twins. He gave Tonks a gift certificate to Flourish and Blotts, not knowing what kind of books she'd like.

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After the girls had returned the books they'd borrowed from the Potter library (and Hermione borrowed fifteen more) they went outside and played a game of Quidditch, after letting everyone (even Hermione, who was scared once she saw how fast it was faked enthusiasm so Harry would see she was interested in his new broom) have a quick go on the Firebolt. At first Hermione didn't want to play, but when she saw Ginny immediately volunteer to be the other Seeker, Hermione decided that she had to at least play the game. Harry's team had him as Seeker, Hermione as Keeper, Fred as Beater, and Sirius and Angela as Chasers. Ginny's team had her as Seeker, Ron as Keeper, George as Beater, and Remus and Tonks as Chasers.

The teams were really well matched. Although Ron was a much better Keeper than Hermione, Angela was an incredible Chaser and would usually get past him when she got the Quaffle. The score was even when Harry spotted the snitch just above the hoops Hermione was guarding. He took off on his Firebolt, and noticed that Ginny was also flying at it from a completely different direction, and she was closer. He leaned into his broom, maximizing the acceleration. When

he got to the right spot, he smiled as he saw the snitch halfway between Hermione and Ginny. He reached out his hand to grabbed the snitch, immediately feeling Ginny's hand slap his, with the snitch stuck in between their hands. He looked at Ginny and both of them started laughing while Hermione did her best to stop from scowling.

"Game's over! We've got the snitch!" he yelled out. "We grabbed it at the same time and it's between our hands."

"Wow," said Fred.

"That's the closest Harry's ever come to losing the Snitch!" said George.

"It's a good thing Ginny's in Gryffindor," said Fred.

"Otherwise we'd have to kill her so she couldn't play against Harry," said George.

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After Christmas day, Harry started working on his assignments every day, and before he knew it, he and Moony had portkeyed to the Shrieking Shack and made their way into Hogwarts Castle for another term.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 8 – Flying**

At the first Quidditch practice of the term, Harry nonchalantly took his Firebolt out to the pitch and started flying until Angelina Johnson called out, “Harry, is that a new broom?” Harry had sworn (actually bribed) the twins to silence because he wanted his new broom to be a surprise for the team.

“Yeah,” said Harry, trying not to sound excited, “I got it for Christmas.”

Oliver Wood started flying toward Harry within a few seconds of hearing that. Angelina said, “That’s not a Nimbus 2001, and I know you wouldn’t start using one that’s not as good as your old broom. What kind is it? I’ve never seen that before.”

Oliver Wood went crazy with excitement as he recognized it. “That-That’s a-a FIREBOLT! But it can’t be! They haven’t been released yet! How’d you get it?”

Harry smiled with pride over his new broom. “My godfather knows someone in management at the company who makes them. They think Harry Potter’s endorsement will help them sell brooms, so they let Sirius buy it early.”

“Wow!” said Oliver, “I read about it in a magazine. It’s supposed to become the professional standard broom! I never thought we’d have one on our team! Why don’t you show us what it can do!”

After doing several stunts and dives, the Snitch got released and Harry kept catching it easily and released it again. The whole team was thrilled about it, and their chances of winning the Quidditch House Cup never looked better.

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“I’ll bet you enjoyed that!” said Ginny happily as Harry was telling the girls about his team’s reaction to the Firebolt.

“I’ll add it to my list of good memories Flitwick told me to make for my next class,” Harry said.

“Good memories?” repeated Hermione, “There’s nothing in that book about that.”

“Dumbledore told Flitwick he wanted me to learn something called a Patronus before anything else.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide, “Those are used for delivering messages or...fighting Dementors.”

Ginny almost fell off her chair. “Dementors? Th-Those are the horrid creatures that guard Azkaban. Dad says they take away your happiness just by being near you, and that they can even take away your soul.”

“But they obey the Ministry,” said Hermione, “You shouldn’t have to fight them.”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know. Flitwick mentioned that they were on Voldemort’s side during the last war. Maybe Dumbledore thinks they’ll join him again if/when he comes back. I’ll ask him about it at our next meeting.”

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Professor Dumbledore had by this time told Harry all about Tom Riddle’s past, and about Horcruxes, along with his suspicions about there being several. Dumbledore had even told Harry what objects he thought the Horcruxes were. Harry had said, “Isn’t it more important to figure out where he’s hiding them than what they are?”

Dumbledore chuckled at this question. “Quite right, Harry. Quite right. Knowing what object it is doesn’t tell us where it is, but knowing the location and investigating it would inevitably show us what the cursed object is. I shall focus my efforts on determining possible locations to search this term, and begin investigating those locations this summer. It shouldn’t take long to investigate the locations, once I know where to go.”

“You should bring help.”

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This meeting, Harry simply said, "Why are you having me learn how to make a patronus? Do you think Dementors will attack me?"

Albus sighed. "By their very nature, Dementors are among the foulest creatures we know of. They side with whoever offers them the most prey. If Professor Trelawney's latest prediction and your dream are true, then Voldemort will rise soon. When that happens, the Dementors will join him once again, and we may not have enough time to teach you before you get attacked. This is just a precaution, but I feel it is a necessary one."

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The general atmosphere of Hogwarts was a bit on edge with Aurors at every entrance because of increased security. Lupin had even had Dumbledore assign guards to hallways that had secret entrances without revealing their exact locations.

Minister Bones in the meantime had been working to change prejudiced laws. The biggest controversial law that she was trying to get passed was one that changed the ministry's taxing practice. Early in her search of prejudiced laws, she had found that pureblood witches and wizards were not taxed. Instead, the burden of supporting the government fell on the half-bloods, muggleborns, squibs that lived in the wizarding world, and other sentient magical beings (such as goblins). An article of the Daily Prophet had quoted Madam Bones as saying, 'It's ironic that a government fully supported by non-purebloods tends to favor them. It's also ironic that on the rare occasions when pureblood families like the Malfoys made a monetary contribution to the ministry, everyone thought they were so generous while the non-purebloods were always supporting the government.' The Weasleys weren't entirely thrilled about that law, but they understood that it was only fair. They also knew that taxes would be based on income, and that they would get tax discounts based off of how many children they were supporting.

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In the middle of January, Harry had a conversation that he would be thinking about for a long time. He'd been on his way back from

Quidditch practice when he saw Draco Malfoy's head sticking out of a classroom. "Hey Potter," he whispered, "I want to talk to you."

Harry pulled out his wand instinctively and pointed it at Malfoy. He whispered, "Fine, but if it's a trap, you'll be the first one hexed."

Harry walked into the classroom and couldn't see anyone else. He then shot a spell that sent a sheet of light around the room. It looked as though a bright white sheet was stretched horizontally across the room at about three feet above the ground for fifteen seconds. Harry gave a look of satisfaction and said, "Ok Malfoy, what did you want to talk about?"

"What was that?" asked Draco.

Harry grinned. "Something I learned from Flitwick. I was just making sure nobody was wearing an invisibility cloak in here."

Draco's expression went from interest to anger to shame in about three seconds. "I guess you don't entirely trust me."

"You could say that," said Harry coldly, "What's this about?"

Draco looked around the room, and then settled with looking at his feet. "I-I've heard some things in the Slytherin dorm. I, well, thought I should tell you."

"Go on," said Harry.

Draco's ears were turning pink as he took a deep breath. "Well, I...I heard that You-Know-Who may be gaining power. Crabbe's father told him that his Dark Mark, a magical tattoo that faded quite a bit when you-you became the Boy-Who-Lived, that He gave every Death Eater, is showing up more clearly. I overheard him telling Goyle last night. Since everything's happened with my father they don't talk to me much."

Harry wasn't sure what to think. He felt like saying, 'That's what happens when you buy your friends,' but didn't think that would be the best thing to say. Instead, Harry said, "Why are you telling me this?"

Draco shuffled his feet. "Well, I, I know you talk to Dumbledore. I can't be seen going to see him, or talking to you." Draco took a deep breath. "Since, since I don't have much money anymore, I'm, well, not very popular in Slytherin. If I'm caught talking with Dumbledore or a teacher, they all might...might." He sighed again. "Anyway, I know my father's in-in trouble with the Dark Lord. If, if He returns, then he won't treat my father any better than a mudblood. He'll probably be killed. He doesn't tolerate failure. I-I thought if the Dark Lord could be stopped from returning to power, my father could be saved."

Harry sighed. He knew Draco had had a hard time lately, and that for the past few months he hadn't insulted anyone that Harry was aware of. He supposed he could understand Draco doing whatever it took to save his father's life. Although Harry couldn't stand Lucius Malfoy, he supposed Draco loved him. "I-I'll tell Dumbledore what you told me, and one of us will back to you, er, discretely."

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Neither Hermione nor Ginny was sure if he could trust Draco or not, but both agreed he should tell the headmaster. After dinner, Harry had gone to Dumbledore's office and told the headmaster what Draco had told him.

"It is as we feared," said the aged professor. "Voldemort must be gaining strength through the ministrations of Peter Pettigrew as you dreamed. He will probably make some sort of action aimed at getting a body soon. We must be on our guard. As for young Mr. Malfoy. We may be able to offer protection for him and his family, but they must want it. I believe that it would be best if Draco spoke to Lucius about this matter. I will arrange for Professor Lupin to assign him a detention. It would be best if he didn't know the plan at the time so that he shows an appropriate amount of anger for being blamed for something he didn't do. That will be the perfect time to speak with him briefly and allow him to visit Azkaban."

-

The next day, they had Defense Against the Dark Arts class with the Slytherins. Harry was already seated when Malfoy, looking sullen, walked inside. He caught Malfoy's eye and almost imperceptibly

nodded his head, and looked away. Fortunately, no one noticed. About half way through the lesson, Harry felt himself put into the full body-bind and fell. As he lay down, facing the floor, he heard Lupin angrily say, "Draco Malfoy! You are never going to pull a prank in my class again!"

Draco paled, "But I didn..."

"Deny it all you want, but I know the truth! You've hated Harry since the day you met him! You are going to come back here immediately after dinner for detention!"

"But I..."

"Do you want me to start taking house points too?" shouted Lupin angrily.

Malfoy looked around to see his fellow Slytherins staring intently at him. "No, sir," he said, looking and feeling defeated.

Of course, while Harry was listening to that, he figured out what was happening, so when Lupin released him, he shot quite a few dirty looks at Draco, who occasionally would look at him, trying to say he didn't do it.

The next morning, Harry noticed that Draco looked depressed at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Harry didn't have a class with the Slytherins that day, so he had to keep wondering what happened throughout the day. Finally, after dinner, Harry went up to Professor Dumbledore's office to ask what had happened with Draco.

Albus looked very old. "I am afraid that Lucius Malfoy said he'd rather die by the hand of Voldemort, of course he called him the Dark Lord, than live among his enemies. He of course called his enemies blood traitors and mudbloods. He called Draco a blood-traitor, among many other things, and disowned him, saying that he'll make sure he and his mother die for their betrayal – did I mention that Draco's mother approved of Draco's plan? Fortunately, since no one ever visits Lucius, and he is not allowed to send letters out, he won't be able to carry out his threat unless he escapes, which probably won't happen unless Voldemort rises. If either of those two things occur, or we have



reason to believe that Lucius has somehow convinced someone to attack his family, I have agreed to offer protection to himself and his mother.”

“I see,” said Harry, not able to say much as the concept of helping a Malfoy entered his head.

“By the way Harry, before Draco told his father of his plans, he managed to get him to confirm that his Dark Mark is getting much clearer.

-

After Harry informed the girls about this development, Ginny said, “Imagine hiding from You-Know-Who in the same house as the Malfoys?”

“I’d probably leave and take my chances,” said Harry.

“Of course you wouldn’t,” said Hermione. “You may possibly avoid each other, but you wouldn’t let your distrust of Malfoy cause your death.”

-

At the end of January, during Quidditch practice, Wood shouted out to Harry, who was in the air, “I’m gonna release the Snitch, and I want to see how fast you can catch it on that Firebolt!”

Soon the golden ball with wings was flying all over the pitch, with a raven-haired pursuer right behind it. Harry reached out his hand and grabbed the Snitch triumphantly. As soon as his hand closed around the tiny orb, he felt a familiar sensation of being pulled behind his navel.

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He arrived at an unfamiliar place, but found he was still on his Firebolt. He felt himself shot in the leg from a spell and fell off the broom. He saw that it landed safely in front of a large gravestone that said, ‘Tom Riddle.’ He started moving fast to avoid getting hit, but it was difficult.

He pulled his wand out of his pocket to duel his opponent, but his injured leg gave out on him. He felt his body magically picked up and set against a large gravestone. Pettigrew had him magically bound by ropes. Harry said, "Activate Shrieking Shack," to activate his portkey, and for a moment felt the tugging behind his navel, but he didn't move. He swore to himself, figuring that the place was warded against portkeys. 'But the Snitch portkey worked,' he thought, 'I wonder why that portkey works.' He finally got a good look at his attacker, and recognized him as Wormtail, the rat that had betrayed his parents, carrying something horrid that appeared to be the size of a baby.

Harry watched in horror as Wormtail threw that thing into a huge cauldron and then levitated a leg bone into the cauldron. He heard Pettigrew say, "*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!*" Harry almost vomited as he watched Peter cut off his own right hand with a shining silver dagger into the cauldron saying, "*Flesh - of the servant - willingly given - you - will revive - your master*" in between cries of pain.

Then Wormtail, bleeding terribly and shaking from pain, turned toward Harry. As he cut the arm of Harry's Quidditch jersey, he said, "*B-blood of the enemy...forcibly taken...you will...resurrect...your foe.*"

'Forcibly taken,' thought Harry, as he tried not to think about how Wormtail was cutting his arm. 'Does that mean he can't use it if it's willing,' he wondered to himself. "Take it you traitor!" he shouted at Pettigrew, "Then go to Hell!"

He watched Wormtail spill the drops of his blood into the Cauldron. Harry began struggling to get free while Peter watched the cauldron in anticipation. The green-eyed boy found that he was just small enough to get out of the ropes that were binding him to the gravestone. As he looked around and noticed two important things, a plan began to formulate in his mind.

As Voldemort's form appeared and Pettigrew robed his master, Harry managed to get his left leg free of the ropes without making a sound. He quickly lifted his injured right leg out, whimpering quietly as

Voldemort said, "Give me my wand." Harry kneeled to the ground, allowing his arms and head to get free. "WHERE ARE YOU GOING POTTER!" shouted Voldemort suddenly, and Harry grabbed his Firebolt and started taking off toward the sky before he'd even mounted it properly. He saw the green flash hit the gravestone behind where he'd been. He scanned the sky for an instant (still moving), trying to decide which way to go, when he saw it about a foot above the ground, ten feet from Voldemort, who seemed to be having trouble breathing. Harry decided to try it.

He dove as red and green flashes of light shot behind him as he reached out for the golden Snitch. This was the most important Quidditch game of his life. He closed in on the tiny ball and felt the familiar tug from behind his navel as he left that horrific scene behind.

He found himself flying in the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch with a bleeding arm. Practice was obviously over since no one else was in the sky. He was about twenty feet in the air, so he decided to land. As he was approaching the ground, he saw Dumbledore, Lupin, Ginny, Hermione, and most of the team on the ground, with the exception of Oliver Wood, looking panicked. There were also several aurors who looked bewildered present.

When someone spotted him making his way down, they smiled until they saw his appearance. He got to the ground and started to dismount, but was painfully reminded of his leg injury. Staying on his broom, he looked Dumbledore in the eyes and said, "He's back! Voldemort's back!"

He watched the headmaster age about fifty years. "Are you all right? Can you talk about it now?"

Harry took a deep breath and said while everyone was watching him intently, "I-I can talk about it. When I grabbed the Snitch...."

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As he told his tale, a few others came out to the pitch. McGonagall was helping Oliver Wood, who was holding his head. When Harry finished his story, Oliver told about how he'd encountered himself, and been stupefied just before practice. Upon further questioning,

Oliver admitted that a Slytherin girl had come onto him the week before, pulling him into an empty classroom and trying to kiss him. When he'd rejected her, claiming he already had a girlfriend, her hands that had been around his neck pulled at his hair as she screamed at him.

"Polyjuice Potion," said Albus. "She must have given a sample of your hair to someone skilled enough to make a portkey that could get past Hogwarts' wards, quite possibly a former instructor."

"Snape?" said Ginny.

Albus put his head down. "Probably, although I will not judge a man until he is proven guilty."

This made Harry curious about why his portkeys worked at Hogwarts but not at the graveyard, but he wasn't about to ask that question in front of everybody else. The imposter Oliver Wood had apparently escaped in the chaos surrounding Harry's disappearance. Harry, along with the real Oliver, was brought to the hospital wing. Only then did his adrenaline fade away while the horror of what he'd been through started to sink in. Trying to console himself, he thought, 'At least nobody died.'

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 9 – Protection**

Harry woke up in the hospital wing feeling well rested. The dreamless sleep potion Madam Pomfrey had insisted he drink had done its job. He grabbed for his glasses and looked around. He saw that Oliver Wood was still asleep, and if he remembered correctly, his Quidditch captain would be spending one more night there for observation. He turned the other way to see Ginny, Hermione, and Sirius sleeping in nearby chairs. While he was contemplating waking his visitors up, Madam Bones, followed closely by Professor Dumbledore, walked into the hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey was about to interfere, but Harry saw the headmaster give her a look that said not to. Upon seeing him awake, they walked up to him, Minister Bones speaking first.

“Good morning Mr. Potter,” she said with concern, “How are you feeling?”

Remembering his injuries, Harry moved his arms and legs and happily pronounced, “I feel fine.” He did notice a scar on his arm where he’d been cut, but didn’t feel any pain.

“That’s good news, Harry,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes. “Minister Bones has a request to make of you.”

Harry turned to the woman. “Yes, Minister?”

She looked nervous. “I, er, request that you allow me to extract a copy of your memory from the graveyard for ministry records. We hope that by reviewing it we can gain helpful information in the fight against You-Know-Who.”

Harry sighed irritably. “Of course I’ll be happy to provide the memory, but the first piece of information I’d like to give is that Voldemort’s...” Bones flinched at the name, “...name is Tom Marvolo Riddle and that fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself.”

“I quite agree, minister,” said Dumbledore with a smile. “A nameless fear cannot be defeated, but a mortal man can. And Voldemort can be killed. He has taken steps to make that difficult, but no matter what he believes, he is a man, not a god.”

Bones nodded. "Very well. Vol-Voldemort's return is a problem we cannot afford to ignore. After I've seen Mr. Potter's memory Albus, I suggest that you and I discuss ways to prevent his gaining power. I know that you were a leader in our last struggle against him."

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It had been hard to force himself to relive the way that monster took his blood, but Harry had managed to produce the memory for Bones, and asked her to duplicate it so that he could show it to his friends rather than relive it again and again. When he was done, Albus and Amelia left, with Dumbledore requesting Harry to see him in his office once Madam Pomfrey released him. Harry found out that classes for the day had been cancelled. Sirius, who'd woken up during the process, went straight over to Harry and hugged him, saying, "I'm so sorry we couldn't stop him from taking your blood!"

Harry grinned. "It wasn't forcibly taken like Wormtail said it should be, I told him to take it, and I think that's why Voldemort has breathing problems!"

"Really?" said Sirius with a grin, "That's the best news I've heard all night!"

At this time both Ginny and Hermione woke up and rushed over to hug him tightly. Hermione said, "How are you feeling, Harry?"

His ears turned pink and he got slightly irritable. "Well, yesterday I was kidnapped so Voldemort could use my blood to help resurrect himself, but aside from that, peachy."

Ginny rolled her eyes at Hermione. "We're sorry. Your experience is probably the last thing you want to talk about. I'm just glad you escaped. I know you'll be all right eventually. If you want to talk, I'm here, but I promise not to force you."

"That goes for me as well," said Hermione.

Harry smiled at his two best friends. "Thanks. I just gave Minister Bones my memory of the graveyard, and she said she'd copy it for

me. If you want, I'll let you two watch it. That should answer any questions you might have about it without making me relive it again."

-

A few hours later, Harry found himself sitting in the headmaster's office, discussing what happened the day before. He'd been given a thought sphere that contained his memory of the ordeal. Albus said, "I believe that your volunteering your blood as you did interfered with the success of the ceremony. Voldemort did still get a body, but not a healthy one. During your escape, he demonstrated some sort of breathing problem. Only time will tell the extent of that problem and if there are more problems than that."

"Won't he be able to just get a healer to fix whatever's wrong with him?" asked Harry skeptically.

With a twinkle in his eyes, Dumbledore said, "No, I don't think so. The foul creation that he made last night is not a human body. Consequently, any healing spells, or muggle medicines for that matter, wouldn't work on him. I'm afraid he's stuck with what he has."

Harry smiled. "Good. Another thing I'm curious about is that Wormtail not only gave him 'flesh of the servant,' but also the bones and blood in his hand. Why didn't that mess up the spell?"

"That is a good point Harry. The ceremony did call for specific elements. Apparently Voldemort accounted for that in the ceremony. Theoretically, it would've been better for Peter to have simply cut off some skin, but I believe that Voldemort wanted him to suffer more."

"And Pettigrew is stupid enough to go along with it," said Harry coldly.

"I wouldn't underestimate Pettigrew if I were you," said the headmaster. "After all, he has evaded capture for several years."

Harry took a deep breath. "I know that he's devious, but I think anyone who joins Voldemort is stupid. From what you've told me and what I saw last night, he doesn't treat his allies any better than his enemies. The only difference is they don't fight back. Not to mention that they help him gain power."

Albus nodded. "Very good assessment. He tortures his followers more often than his enemies. Joining Voldemort does not save you from any pain. In fact, you also have to deal with a seared conscience in addition to multiple Cruciatus Curses."

"So why do people join him?" asked Harry.

"For several reasons. One is so that they can treat others the way Voldemort treats them. Many Death Eaters enjoy inflicting pain as much as their master, and have been known to drive some of their victims completely mad from the pain. Others simply fear what he'll do to them if they don't join him, but as you've realized, they don't save themselves from any pain that way, and only succeed in making their lives more miserable than most people can imagine. Still others actually agree with the so-called-ideals that he pretends to support, such as prejudice against non-purebloods. The truth, as you are well aware, is that he's not a pureblood to begin with, and that he hates everybody equally, regardless of their bloodline. He simply wanted the resources of the purebloods, since they have more gold than muggleborns. But because of their dedication to that rather ludicrous prejudice, people like Lucius Malfoy are happy to live and die at Voldemort's command, which leads me to the purpose of this meeting."

Harry nodded with understanding. "The Malfoys."

"Yes. As you know, I promised sanctuary to Mrs. Malfoy and Draco. Draco should be safe here, although based off of yesterday, I can't guarantee that, but his mother should be immediately moved from Malfoy Manor. She may decide if she wishes to withdraw her son from Hogwarts. Now the most important thing is that no one ever suspects where they are hiding." He then gave Harry a devious look. "I trust that as far as the students besides your best friends are concerned, you and young Mr. Malfoy still hate each other with a passion?"

Harry, who felt he knew where this was going, chuckled slightly. "Yes."



“Then may I suggest that they take refuge in one of your houses. I’ll personally make sure that they have no tracking spells on anything they bring with them.”

“Are you going to put the house I choose under the Fidelius Charm?” asked Harry, concerned.

“If you’ll agree to it,” said Albus, looking straight into Harry’s eyes. After a moment, Harry nodded solemnly. “I would guess, based off of your family’s experience with Wormtail, that you would personally want to be the Secret-Keeper.”

“I would prefer that.”

“Then I shall move Mrs. Malfoy today, and on Saturday we shall perform the spell. The only question left is which house they will use.”

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The details were worked out, and Harry told Ginny and Hermione about it (privately so they weren’t overheard). Harry also knew that Draco would be informed of what was going on and would be instructed to act as mean as ever toward Harry. Even after the Fidelius Charm was placed on the house, they wouldn’t want anyone to guess that Harry had anything to do with where Mrs. Malfoy was. Otherwise they may suspect Harry was the Secret-Keeper or at least knew who it was.

Harry met with Dumbledore the next day and was informed, “Mrs. Malfoy has been successfully moved to your house. She also brought the one house elf she was allowed to keep.”

“Really?” asked Harry. “They let her keep an elf when they took all her money?”

Albus smiled. “You must realize that most ancient pureblood families such as hers, which I’m not sure whether you’re aware or not is the Black family, and the Malfoys don’t teach any useful skills to their members. Such work is considered beneath them. She is completely incapable of the simplest culinary task such as boiling water, magical or muggle style. She would’ve starved to death by now.”

Harry chuckled, and then looked surprised. "The Black family? As in Sirius Black?"

"Yes. She's his cousin. But I do believe that when Sirius ran away from home and came to live with the Potters he did learn some skills. The Potters never wanted to be completely dependant on house elves."

Harry grinned. "I guess not. There was something else I was curious about."

"Oh, just the one?" asked Dumbledore.

Harry slightly chuckled. "For now, anyway. My portkeys work in Hogwarts but didn't work in the cemetery. But Voldemort's portkey worked at both places. Do you know why that is?"

"Well, that's an interesting question. Fortunately, the answer isn't too difficult. As you have probably guessed, Voldemort created a ward around the cemetery to prevent your escape, and Hogwarts itself has wards. If you create the wards or are very familiar with them, you can create portkeys that can penetrate them. Voldemort wished for his portkey to bring you to the cemetery, so he made it so. He also wished for his portkey to get past Hogwarts' wards, so he used someone's..."

"Snape's," interjected Harry.

"Perhaps," said Dumbledore sadly, "someone's knowledge of Hogwarts' wards to make it possible. The creator of your portkeys was apparently familiar with the wards surrounding Hogwarts, as well as the wards around the Potter properties, because there are wards surrounding those houses that I don't have enough knowledge to work around without more extensive study of them, but was unfamiliar with Voldemort's wards."

"Then who made them?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Based off of the fact that one of them leads to the Shrieking Shack, which was built the year your father started attending Hogwarts, I would guess it was him, although I was not

aware that he had such an intricate knowledge of the wards surrounding Hogwarts. But I did know that he and his friends were very resourceful, and knew a lot more about Hogwarts than most people. He also strikes me as a person who would want a fast way to get to all those locations from anywhere, including Hogwarts.”

“Where you can’t apparate from.” Harry grinned. “It’s too bad my parents weren’t wearing portkeys when they were attacked.”

“There would have been no point,” said Dumbledore. “They knew that if they were found, Voldemort would’ve put wards up to stop them from leaving, so wearing portkeys would only have given him access to other Potter houses for him to use and plunder if he even realized that your parents were wearing portkeys.

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“This seems so weird,” said Harry to Ginny and Hermione. It was Saturday, and all three of them were at the house Harry had chosen for the Malfoys. Draco was also there, visiting his mum while they decided whether or not he should stay at Hogwarts. The Malfoys were civil to Harry and his friends, but couldn’t completely lose their prejudices so fast. They had trouble imagining how a pureblood (Ginny), a half-blood (Harry), and mudblood (Hermione) could get along so well as equals, so they avoided them. Dumbledore had started placing the Fidelius Charm on the house, and would get Harry when he was needed. “Helping the Malfoys is something I never thought I’d do.”

“Don’t think of it as helping the Malfoys,” suggested Ginny, “Think of it as fighting Lucius Malfoy.”

“Or Voldemort,” said Hermione.

Harry sighed, “I guess.”

“You’re doing this because it’s the right thing to do,” said Hermione emphatically.

At that moment, Draco walked out of the bedroom where he'd been talking to his mum and walked up to them. "My house is bigger than this," he said with a smirk.

Harry decided to go along with it. "So is Potter Manor. Do you think I'd give you my best house? This is one of the worst."

Draco smiled. "Just how many houses do you own, and why doesn't anybody know about them? I mean, we knew the Potters had money, but not this much."

Harry said, "I don't want to be known or liked because of my money or fame. I want people to like me for me. That's the way to get real friends."

"Anyway," said Draco as his ears turned pink, "I, er, wanted to, well, thank you for what you're doing here. I, er, am returning to Hogwarts, so I'll have to act like, y'know."

"I know," said Harry with a smirk, "And I'll be happy to act like I hope you die a horrible painful death in front of me too."

"Harry," called Albus from the doorway, "It's time."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 10 – Attack of the Slytherins**

Harry walked with Professor Dumbledore to the outside of the house. While they were walking, Harry asked the headmaster, “Do you think you could make Draco a portkey here? He might get in trouble in the Slytherin dorm and need to leave in a hurry, but I don’t want to give him the one my father made.”

The aged professor looked at Harry. “That is a thoughtful idea. If Voldemort does free Lucius, no doubt he will quickly spread the word about his son. Some Death Eaters may employ their older children to kill him.” Dumbledore sighed. “He wouldn’t be able to use the portkey lightly if I set it where it can’t enter Hogwarts. I should probably set up protective wards around his bed at Hogwarts as well. If this does prove to be a problem, I may have to provide other accommodations for him.”

Harry looked at Dumbledore strangely. “I don’t think he’d be welcomed in Gryffindor Tower. Or Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw for that matter.”

“There are other options. It is a rather large castle. Anyway, we must continue the task at hand. For the most part, you’ll simply stand where you are as I perform some spells, but at a certain point you’ll...” Dumbledore went on explaining what Harry’s part of the ritual would be. After they finished it, Dumbledore took all the children back to Hogwarts, using a portkey he’d created out of a cotton sock.

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Within a week of Voldemort’s resurrection, everybody knew he was back. A small percentage of children had been removed from Hogwarts, and Hagrid was gone. Dumbledore had told Harry that the half-giant had been requested to join the ministry in an attempt to either persuade the giants to take their side in the conflict, or at least remain neutral. Minister Bones had also removed the Dementors from Azkaban (much to the relief of the prisoners) and replaced them with aurors. Enrollment in the auror program had gone up incredibly since the announcement of Voldemort’s return. Minister Bones had decided to create a different branch of law enforcement similar to the

muggle military that had a faster and more intense training program to handle those that had signed up to fight Voldemort since there were many laws and procedures they really wouldn't need to know to fight Death Eaters. They would be called the 'Life Force.' Bones even came up with a 'Life Mark' for them to shoot into the sky over places they had victories to combat the Dark Mark. It showed a lion eating a snake (Slytherins didn't like it, but Bones didn't care).

Dumbledore had reorganized the Order of the Phoenix as an intelligence gathering organization, and agreed to share the knowledge that they gathered with Bones. Harry had been brought to the Department of Mysteries to destroy the copy of the prophecy that was there so Voldemort wouldn't get it. They replaced it with a thought sphere that contained a very rude message from Harry to Voldemort.

The only thing that the girls told Harry after watching his memory of the graveyard was that he was very brave and they were proud of him. The Daily Prophet had run an article describing his valiant battle with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Harry thought that the way the paper described it, you'd think he'd dueled Voldemort instead of just escaping.

A lot more students started attending Lupin's dueling club, and he started splitting the class up into two groups: those that had been attending since the beginning and the new people. He had Harry teaching the new people, including Draco Malfoy.

When Draco walked into the room the first time, every eye was on him. When he'd originally found out that Harry was second-in-command of the club he'd publicly refused to be a part of anything 'scar-head' was that involved with. Keeping with their agreement of open hostility, Harry glared at Malfoy, hissing, "What do you want?" as he reached for his wand.

Malfoy glared right back at Harry with contempt, drawing his wand. "I thought I'd amuse myself by watching your pathetic attempt at teaching defense, scarhead!"

"I'm not here to amuse the likes of you, MALFOY!" shouted Harry. "If you want to participate with everyone and maybe even learn

something for the first time in your pathetic life, fine! You'll be in my group! If you start any trouble, I'll personally hex your bits off!"

"Potter, Malfoy!" shouted Lupin, joining the show, "calm down and take your places!"

"Fine," both boys said and went to the other side of the room where Harry began teaching the beginning spells.

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It was the day after that display in the dueling club that the news arrived in the Daily Prophet.

*"Azkaban Attacked – Death Eaters Escape*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*Yesterday, You-Know-Who and several of his followers attacked Azkaban, which is now guarded by aurors instead of Dementors. The attack occurred in broad daylight. One minute everything was fine, and the next, several aurors had received the killing curse. The attacking group of Death Eaters hurried to start freeing prisoners, but were met by more aurors after they'd released three prisoners. Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange were successfully broken out while Antonin Dolohov died while attempting escape. There were no other Death Eater casualties...."*

The article went on saying how terrible it was that Azkaban could be breached and that the Dementors would've done a better job guarding it. Dumbledore made an announcement to the school that, "The Dementors were occupied attacking muggles in London while the attack on Azkaban was going on, resulting in ten losing their souls. Unfortunately, Miss Skeeter must have overlooked this fact while writing her article advocating their return."

Harry snuck a glance toward Draco and saw his look of terror. He got up and walked to Lupin at the head table.

"Hello, Harry," said the werewolf. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to suggest that we combine our groups for the next few weeks and try teaching the Patronus Charm."

Remus looked a bit startled for a moment before saying, "I guess we should. With Dementors attacking people, we need to."

"Someone should also keep an eye on Malfoy. With his dad out of prison, he's probably already spread the word that his wife and son are what they call blood-traitors."

"Good idea. I'll ask Professor Mathews to stop in the Slytherin dormitory a few times a day."

-

Draco Malfoy was silently sitting at a table in the Slytherin common room working on Transfiguration homework when Theodore Nott walked up to him, with Crabbe and Goyle beside him, and shouted for everyone to hear, "Malfoy! My father says you disgraced your family by becoming a blood-traitor."

Draco sneered at him, "You're the disgrace, Nott."

Nott ignored this and continued. "Your mummy also ran away from home."

Draco ignored this and made a show of picking up his quill to keep writing.

"She's probably shagging a muggle right now for money so she can live."

Draco drew his wand and shouted, "Stupify!" causing Nott to fall to the floor, but then several Slytherins, including Crabbe and Goyle, drew their wands and pointed them at Draco.

Blaise Zabini spoke. "Malfoy, you just attacked another Slytherin." He took a step forward. "You hexed one of your betters."

Draco looked around to see nearly half of the occupants of the room, many of them older than himself, coming at him, while the others



clearly did not want to get involved. The blonde boy put up a protego shield like he'd learned in the dueling club that day as nearly a dozen spells were launched at him. The first few were blocked by his shield, but Draco saw that his shield was getting weaker and weaker. In desperation, he activated the portkey that was hanging around his neck. As he was feeling the familiar tug beneath his navel, one of the spells got through his shield, and he fell to the ground unconscious. He didn't see Professor Mathews enter the room to see Draco bombarded by spells as he disappeared

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"Enervate," said Narcissa Malfoy as she pointed her wand at her son.

He opened his eyes and remembered what had happened. He immediately realized that his left arm was in a lot of pain. He winced and looked at the offending limb, and winced again when he saw that it looked like it had been sliced up and mostly healed, leaving terrible scars. "Wh-What?"

"Your arm?" asked his mother as she seemed to be fighting tears. "That was hit with a spell that Severus Snape invented. It's called, 'Sectumsempra.' Apparently he's been teaching it to the older students. You're lucky it only hit your arm. The boys that did this to you are being slapped in the wrists. They lost a bunch of house points and got detention for their attempted murder." She chuckled. "If they'd been attacking anyone else, I'd probably have thought it was fine last summer. Your father was trying to get every mudblood at your school killed when he gave Ginny Weasley that diary." She sighed. "Are we really that heartless?"

Draco looked at his mother as he contemplated this. "I know that when father was arrested I'd have used that sectumsempra spell on Harry Potter without a second thought if I'd known it, and all he was doing is saving lives. Father really doesn't care about us at all, does he?"

Narcissa took a deep breath. "Your father never cared about anything except the pureness of his blood. Our marriage was arranged by our parents, and he viewed me as a tool to make an heir with. He didn't care who you really were inside. He just wanted you to be exactly like

him. Once you proved that you're not him, he stopped pretending to care. I used to think that any pureblood who didn't follow the Dark Lord was a traitor, but the truth is that they never made any vows to follow him, so they're not betraying anybody. We're the ones who turned our backs on our humanity to the point that we try to kill our own families if they won't join us."

At that moment, the fireplace at the house they were staying at glowed with green flames. It was set to receive calls, but not allow anyone to enter that way. However, it would allow people to leave that way. Professor Dumbledore's face appeared in the emerald flames. "Oh good. You're awake, Mr. Malfoy. How are you feeling?"

"A bit sore, but I'll live."

"Splendid. I wanted to know if you are planning to return to Hogwarts."

"Mother told me that the students that attacked me haven't been expelled, so no."

"They have been punished," said Dumbledore.

"They got detention for trying to murder me. That's the same punishment you get for dropping a dungbomb in a classroom."

"They also lost all of Slytherin's house points."

"Those are my house points, too. Besides, do you think they give a damn about house points? The only reason we used to win the house cup was that Snape kept giving us points for harassing Gryffindors and taking away points from anyone who tried to do anything about it. Since he left you may have noticed that we're always last place in points, but still harass Gryffindors. The only reason we were happy we'd win the house cup was because we saw how disappointed everyone else was. We all thought that your house point system was a joke."

Dumbledore looked alarmed. "But surely you exaggerate. Severus may have been a bit biased but..."

“He was teaching dark magic to the older students!” said Draco, losing his patience as he showed his scarred arm to the headmaster. “He invented this spell! He started picking on Harry the moment he first stepped into his classroom! I thought it was funny at the time, but I certainly knew he wasn’t being fair. The older students explained to me last year how Snape would make sure we automatically win the house cup no matter what we do. That’s what happened every year he was at the school. We were totally surprised Gryffindor won last year, but the only reason was that you gave them all those points at the last minute. If Snape would’ve had one class with Gryffindor after that, all those points would’ve been gone.”

“Surely not.”

“You’re a fool if you think otherwise, Professor,” said Narcissa, who’d been silent during this conversation. “Snape would brag about it. Especially about the fact that you actually thought he wasn’t cheating. You’re supposed to be so clever, yet you didn’t notice the way Slytherin started winning the house cup as soon as Snape started teaching there.”

Dumbledore’s ears went pink. “Anyway, I wanted to let Draco know that he can have private quarters if he returns.”

“So I can be murdered in the halls? No thank you. Perhaps you can send my stuff here so I can study on my own. Maybe I’ll be able to take my O.W.L.’s early.”

“So that’s it, then?” said Dumbledore, “You’re just going to run away from your problems.”

“Save that speech for a Gryffindor! Part of being a Slytherin is knowing when to leave.”

“You heard my son! He doesn’t want to go back to his death.”

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 11 – Potter's Army**

The weeks went by quickly after Draco Malfoy left the school. Newspapers reported several Death Eater attacks daily. Minister Bones had repealed the law that said only purely wizarding homes, where every resident was magical, could be connected to the floo network, specifically restricting muggleborn students, as well as people who married muggles, from having floo connections until now. Now, any home that had any witch or wizard living there could have a floo connection, complete with security systems.

Hermione's family immediately got that so they would have a way to escape if they were attacked. Their security system was such that if you weren't on their 'welcome list,' which consisted of the family, Harry, Ginny, and Ron, and tried to floo there, only your head would appear in their fireplace (which had been charmed to not look unusual to any muggles besides Mr. and Mrs. Granger) and would have to wait for a Granger to allow them entrance. Their fireplace also had to be magically enlarged to accommodate people.

Inside Hogwarts, many of the Slytherins started attacking muggleborn students when they found them alone in the halls. When they were found by teachers, they were too scared to say who it was that attacked them, knowing that the bully would only get detention and then attack them some more. Everybody really knew who it was, but couldn't prove it.

Harry, Ginny, and Hermione were taking a shortcut to the Great Hall after he'd taught them the defense he'd learned from Flitwick when they heard a fight. Actually it sounded like a slaughter. Harry signaled his friends to be quiet as he stuck his head around the corner. What he saw made his face turn red with fury. Five older Slytherins were punching, kicking, and cursing a Hufflepuff girl that appeared to be a first year while calling her things like 'mudblood.' Harry also saw Lee Jordan of Gryffindor turn down that hall, stop, and start walking the other way. Harry turned his head to see the girls were watching as well. He whispered, "You don't have to help if you don't want to, but I can't just stand by and watch."

The two girls looked at him like he was insane if he thought they weren't gonna help. He signaled them with his hand. 3, 2, 1, "Now!" he shouted as they all jumped out, put up Protego shields, and started attacking the Slytherins.

"Bates Mocus!" shouted Ginny, forcing bat bogies to come out of and start attacking one of them, who ran off.

"Petrificus Totalus," shouted Hermione, freezing another where he stood.

The other Slytherins started unsuccessfully firing spells at the trio who'd been learning the most advanced defense in the school.

"Expelliarmus!" shouted Harry, disarming two of them who'd been standing too close together, "Stupefy! Stupefy!"

While Harry stunned those two, Hermione petrified the last one, just as Professor McGonagall came hurrying back with the Slytherin who'd escaped. "Mr. Potter! Miss Weasley! Miss Granger! What has gotten into you? Attacking students like this?"

"What?" shouted the three Gryffindors.

"Mr. Hill came running down the hall being chased by...by a curse he said that Miss Weasley shot at him. He said that you three were attacking that girl and he and his friends tried to help."

"That's a LIE!" shouted Harry. "They were attacking the girl. Isn't that true," he said, now looking at the girl who was sitting down trembling and crying. She closed her mouth and refused to answer.

"It's three witnesses against five, Mr. Potter, and you will not speak to me in that tone again!"

"Give us all veritaserum, and have us show our memories in a pensieve," suggested Hermione.

"I should think that you of all people would know that the use of veritaserum on a student is forbidden, and that pensieve memories aren't used to determine punishments for students. I'm taking fifty

points from each of you, and you all have detention. Now go to dinner, and then straight to Gryffindor tower."

They ate quickly and silently, furious at McGonagall, and went back to the common room.

"I can't believe she took points from us for helping a student!" shouted Ginny.

"I don't care what she says, I'm not gonna turn my back on people who need help!" declared Harry.

"But we'll lose all our points like Slytherin, and won't get the house cup," said Hermione.

"If having the damn house cup means we're cowards, I don't want it!" said Harry.

At that point, most of Gryffindor came into the room, having just learned that the trio had cost them one hundred fifty points. "Why were you picking on that Hufflepuff girl?" said Percy to Ginny.

"We were rescuing her, not attacking her!" Ginny shouted at her brother. "Lee saw the Slytherins beating her up and walked away!"

At that moment, Lee nodded his head in shame while Percy looked at him. "I don't care if you were rescuing her or not! You can't cost us house points! Lee did the right thing! Don't get involved! You deserve your detentions!"

That did it. To Harry, the decision was simple. Evil must be opposed, not tolerated. Percy was telling them to tolerate evil. Harry punched Percy.

The sixth-year prefect fell backwards at the second-year's attack. He was sitting on the floor in shock, holding his hand over a quickly blackening eye.

Lee spoke up. "It didn't feel like the right thing. I knew it would cost house points if I interfered. I've never felt lower than when I turned my back on her."

Harry looked at all of them. "You're supposed to be Gryffindors! People with courage, and yet you let the Slytherins take over the school because you're afraid of losing points! I'll bet Lee's not the only one here who's turned his back on suffering!" He saw a lot of faces nod in shame. "I say it's time to forget about house points, because the house cup bluntly doesn't mean a thing if people can't walk the halls of this school without being attacked! Detentions don't last forever. It's not like Filch can hang us by our toes! I think it's time that we acted like Gryffindors and took this school back by force!"

Even though Harry was a second-year, everybody was listening, and most of them were cheering at the end of his speech. Percy of course was glaring at him, but didn't have the guts to confront him when he saw how many people agreed with him.

Harry went on. "If you're with me, stay here, if you're not, would you mind giving us a bit of breathing room so we can plan." Percy was the only one who left. They then discussed their plans of patrolling corridors and always being in groups of at least three, and Harry agreed to start teaching any of them the advanced defense Flitwick had taught him, which had allowed three lower classmen to humiliate five upper classmen.

Their detention ended up being a conversation with Professor McGonagall. "Percy Weasley has informed me of your plans to 'Take back the school.' I must protest this barbarism. Gryffindor..."

"Gryffindor is supposed to be a house of courage, not people who stand by and do nothing while you teachers fail miserably in your responsibility to make this school safe!" Harry shouted.

McGonagall continued as her ears turned pink, "But you..."

"Got detention for stopping five bullies from seriously injuring that girl just because she's muggleborn!" shouted Hermione.

Ginny shouted, "Don't you even know that Slytherin is Voldemort's house? Why on earth would you ever take their word over ours?"

Harry yelled, "Yesterday, at least twenty Gryffindors admitted to having turned their backs to a scene like that one."

“Why don’t they report it?” asked McGonagall with a concerned look on her face.

“Because it doesn’t do any good! Every student that tried to murder Draco Malfoy is still attending school here! And I know they’re helping in this attack on muggleborns! They learned that they can get away with murder literally, and you’re proving them right!” shouted Harry.

Hermione almost looked on the verge of tears. “You’ve failed us, Professor! You failed me! I’m afraid to walk down the halls of this school alone thanks to you and the other professors! It’s got to change, and this is the only way! If it doesn’t change, I don’t think any muggleborn students will return next year. I know I won’t!”

McGonagall was listening to them, realizing the truth of what they were saying, and was fighting an internal battle between rules and justice. She finally said, “Do be careful. Detention over.”

Harry was nervous about Flitwick’s reaction to the situation, but found there was no reason for it. He told Harry, “Why do you think I learned how to duel, Mr. Potter? Go out and kick bigot butt for me!” at the end of his private lesson.

Over the next few weeks, there was more fighting in the halls than ever before as the Gryffindors disciplined the bullies. It was not uncommon to find a group of Slytherins unconscious in the halls. During the second week, people from other houses, including Cedric Diggory of Hufflepuff, started joining what the teachers were calling, ‘Potter’s Army.’ After Harry’s talk with McGonagall, many of the professors started being much more lenient even when they felt obligated to punish ‘soldiers’ for fighting. They’d get detentions that ended up being pep talks. Before long, Percy was the only person in the whole school that would take house points from them. The other prefects, including his now ex-girlfriend Penelope Clearwater, started shunning him. McGonagall decided that she would not recommend him for Head Boy as she’d intended before this situation arose. She felt that he was too Slytherin in putting his ambitions over justice.

About three weeks after the Gryffindors started fighting back, things started to calm down some in the hallways. There were less and less attacks, and the bruised and battered Slytherins seemed much more



subdued. No Gryffindor found any attacks during the fourth week, so during that meeting in the common room (they had one every week, and snuck in the non-Gryffindor members), they had a celebration in which Fred and George brought the butterbeer and food, and sold it for slightly more than you'd pay at Hogsmeade. 'Potter's Army' decided to continue their patrols for the rest of the year, and to wait and see if it was needed the next year.

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In the end, Ravenclaw won the House Cup, but Gryffindor did win the Quidditch cup, which Harry said was much more important. The whole team, and about half of Gryffindor, agreed.

Harry had his last weekly visit of the year with Dumbledore immediately after the feast.

"Well, this year certainly hasn't gone the way I thought it would," said Dumbledore sadly.

"I didn't expect Voldemort to come back either."

"With him back, it's more important than ever that you stay those six weeks at the Dursleys. I've already written them a reminder."

Harry put his head down. "I suppose so, sir."

To change the subject, the aged headmaster said, "I must unofficially commend your success at bringing order back to this school. During my free time this summer, I'll be working on changing Hogwarts' policies regarding punishments. That is, when I'm not searching for Horcruxes."

Harry eagerly asked, "You're hunting Horcruxes?"

"I have a few leads that I'm going to investigate."

"Can I come too?"

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 12 – Back to the Dursleys**

“Harry,” said Dumbledore in his most grandfatherly voice, “I’m afraid that it would be too dangerous.”

“So was being kidnapped by Voldemort,” said Harry pleadingly. “So is being prophesied to either kill him or be killed by him. Everything about my life is dangerous because of him. Sir, I want to help destroy those things.”

“The curses guarding them are far too terrible, Harry. I wouldn’t ask a fifth year to accompany me.”

“If they’re that dangerous, then you shouldn’t go alone! I know you’re powerful, but anyone can make a mistake! Without anyone there to help, you could lose a limb or even your life! Then who’s gonna find the Horcruxes?”

Albus sighed. “You have made some valid points, Harry. I believe that I shall seek help, but I’m afraid you are still too young. I’m afraid Sirius would push me through the death veil if I brought you with me. I rather think he’d want to go himself instead. I’m afraid that my decision is final in this matter, and hope that you’ll trust my judgment.”

Harry took a deep breath to calm himself. “Fine. Can I at least see the memory after you get it?”

Dumbledore smiled, his eyes twinkling again. “Yes, I would be happy to share my memory of the incident once I obtain it.”

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“Well,” said Hermione, “I think it’s good that Professor Dumbledore isn’t going to take you on a dangerous mission.”

“But he has the right to go,” argued Ginny. “I mean, Harry’s already beaten Voldemort twice! Three times if you count when he was a baby!”

“I barely escaped with my life last time!” said Harry miserably, “I didn’t beat him. Dumbledore was right. I’m not ready yet.”

"I thought it was interesting that Professor Dumbledore told you he wouldn't take a fifth year," said Hermione pensively. "I wonder if he meant he'd want someone who'd passed their O.W.L.s."

Harry chuckled slightly. "He'd probably only consider taking someone who'd managed an 'O' in his Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L."

"I'll bet you could get that right now!" said Ginny.

"Hm," said Hermione, "I don't think you would right now, but if we got third, fourth, and fifth year defense books early, I'll bet we all could learn enough by the end of next year to take the test with the fifth years." Harry and Ginny looked at her incredulously. She seemed a bit nervous but kept talking. "I mean, we can practice magic at home now. I think we're already close to fourth year level. If we could pass that test, we could free up some time from our schedules to study even more." She smiled. "We might even be able to get D.A.D.A. N.E.W.T.s while our classmates are taking their O.W.L.s"

"But we've got more classes next year, Hermione," said Harry. "I mean, you've seen the forms they gave us."

"Yes, and I'm signing up for every class."

"Every class?" repeated both Harry and Ginny together.

"Of course."

"But you can't take every class," said Harry, "And even if you could, why would you want to? Muggle studies is pointless to a muggleborn."

"But I could learn it from a wizarding perspective," said Hermione.

"All you'd learn is how to mispronounce words," said Ginny with a giggle. "Bill took the class and found out that most of what he learned was wrong when he dated a muggleborn girl."

"I wonder what class with Trelawney is like," said Harry. "I know she predicted my birth and that Voldemort would come back, but what can someone teach about Divination?"

"All about crystal balls and tea leaves and things like that," said Hermione.

"But that's not how she makes predictions," said Harry, "She just goes into a trance."

"Fred and George think she's a complete fraud," said Ginny. "She predicts a new student to die out of every class each year."

"Oh that sounds fascinating," said Hermione sarcastically. "I predict that I won't take Divination or Muggle Studies."

"Me neither," said Harry. "I guess that leaves Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, and Ancient Runes, plus my extra Defense class with Flitwick."

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The train ride home was uneventful. In other words the Slytherins knew not to cause trouble because Potter's Army had set up patrols every fifteen minutes. Even Harry and the girls did a couple patrols, but they didn't find anyone starting trouble. They did find Percy unsuccessfully trying to break up some seventh-year graduates that were snogging after the bloke had proposed. They thought it was quite humorous watching Percy get frustrated when the couple wouldn't pay attention to him, shouting, "I'm a prefect!" at them.

Hermione giggled, "He reminds me of a character in an old American television show. The actor Don Knotts played a deputy sheriff that no one took seriously because he's an idiot. He got just as frustrated as Percy as he'd show his badge."

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When they arrived at the station, Harry thought he'd see his friends off before he left the Platform. First Ginny and he went with Hermione to say hello to her parents. Hermione hugged both Ginny and Harry before they left. Then they went to the Weasleys, where they walked in on an unusual scene. Percy was in trouble with his mother.

Mrs. Weasley was yelling, "WHAT KIND OF A BLOODY FOOL ARE YOU LETTING PEOPLE GET ATTACKED IN THE HALLWAYS AT SCHOOL! PROFESSOR McGONAGALL OWLED ME THAT YOU WERE EVEN PUNISHING THE PEOPLE LIKE GINNY AND YOUR BROTHERS WHO STOOD UP TO THOSE STINKING SLYTHERINS! YOU SHOULD HAVE JOINED THEM! I HAVE NEVER BEEN SO ASHAMED OF ONE OF MY CHILDREN IN ALL MY LIFE! PROFESSOR McGONAGALL TOLD ME THAT YOU HAVE THROWN AWAY YOUR RECOMMENDATION FOR HEAD BOY BY YOUR COWARDICE!" At this news, Percy flinched. "YOU'LL BE LUCKY IF SHE EVEN DECIDES TO LET YOU KEEP YOUR PREFECT BADGE!"

"But I was only following the rules," argued Percy. He didn't notice that most of the students still at Platform Nine and Three-Quarters were watching him.

"YOU SHOULD BE DOING WHAT'S RIGHT! NOT OBEYING STUPID RULES THAT LET STUDENTS GET BEAT UP SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY'RE MUGGLEBORN! THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH THOSE RULES, AND PROFESSOR DUMBLEDORE WILL BE WORKING ON CHANGING THEM THIS SUMMER, BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT IT'S WRONG TO TURN YOUR BACK ON SUFFERING! Oh, hello Harry-dear. Hello Ginny. It's good to see you both."

"Hello Mrs. Weasley."

"I understand that standing up to the Slytherins was your idea, Harry."

"Yes mum, it was," answered Ginny when Harry blushed and looked down. Percy was glaring at the Boy-Who-Lived. "We'd walked in on some Slytherins ganging up on a first year girl, and Harry wanted to stop them, so naturally, me and Hermione helped."

"That was when Professor McGonagall punished you," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Yes. Then Harry got really mad about it and said that the house cup didn't mean a thing if people couldn't walk the halls of the school without being attacked. He gave a speech in the Gryffindor common

room. You should've heard him, mum! He said that Gryffindors were supposed to be brave and that we should stop those attacks! Every Gryffindor except Percy joined us, but that Slytherin in disguise doesn't count." Ginny knew that this would probably be the only time in her life she could get away with insulting Percy to her mother's face. "Even his Ravenclaw girlfriend dumped him and joined us a few weeks later."

"He punched me!" said Percy bitterly.

"You deserved more than that!" said Molly.

"But I'm a prefect!" he said with a red face.

"Which means you should've been patrolling the halls yourself and trying to put a stop to the attacks!" said Harry coldly as he glared into Percy's eyes, finally speaking. Percy backed up. "Anyway," Harry said smiling at Mrs. Weasley, "I wanted to say hello to you and Mr. Weasley and that I hope to see MOST of your family before the summer's out."

"You are welcome at the Burrow anytime. You know that." She hugged him, and then Ginny hugged him. Harry then started to walk toward the barrier. Before he got there, he heard a shaky female voice calling out, "H-Harry."

He turned to see a blonde haired small girl that he knew he'd seen before somewhere. "Yes?"

She looked down shyly. "I, er, never thanked you for saving me from those Slytherins. If you and your friends hadn't helped me, I don't know what would've happened." He now realized that she was the victim in the attack that had started it all. "I could've been killed. I..."

"It's all right," Harry said uncomfortably. "I'm sure you'd have done the same for me."

"If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be able to come back next year." She then hugged and kissed him on the cheek quickly before turning red and running through the barrier.

He smiled and then continued toward the barrier, thankful for his trunk that shrank into a wallet. He even had Hedwig's cage in it while she was flying to Privet Drive. Therefore he didn't have to carry anything except his wand. He walked through the barrier to see Uncle Vernon with a purple face talking to...Sirius Black in an isolated spot. From what Harry could tell, Padfoot was laying down the law for how Harry was to be treated while at their house.

"There you are, boy," said Vernon, trying to act friendly.

"He has a name!"

"Of course Harry. I...hope you had a good term. Where are your things?"

"I've got them...magically hidden," Harry said vaguely. "I am looking forward to practicing my stunning spells and cutting hexes while I'm at your house. Will Dudley be available to help me in target practice? I've been trying to learn the curse that killed my parents and I wanted to try it out."

"YOU WILL NOT HURT DUDLEY!" shouted Vernon, forgetting about the fully qualified wizard next to him.

"Unless he starts trouble," said Sirius calmly, earning a frightened look from Vernon. "And that goes for any of them. You are not to do any chores for them, although you may cook for yourself if you prefer your own cooking. They are to leave you alone and let you move about the house and neighborhood freely, although it might not be such a good idea to spend much time outside unless you're disguised. We don't want any Death Eaters to recognize you and attack. Killing one of them would be a lot of paperwork at the ministry, especially if they're not recognizable when you're done." Vernon paled. "I believe you've got a book on glamour charms so you can properly hide your identity." Harry nodded. "You may practice magic for school inside your room and defend yourself as needed. If any of them lay one finger on you, do Ginny's favorite hex on them. I will be visiting at least once every week to pay for your meals so they can't call you a freeloader, and to see how you're doing. I'll also be watching you sometimes in my dog form."

Vernon looked almost ready to have a heart attack. “Y-Y-Your dog form?”

Sirius smiled broadly and looked around. Seeing no one, he changed form and walked up to Vernon, who wet his pants. The dog looked around again and changed back. Vernon was literally shaking as he tried to hold one hand in front of his crotch to hide the wet spot.

Padfoot grinned. “See you around,” and disappeared with a small pop.

Vernon hurried to his car and Harry happily followed. He was going to have fun this summer.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 13 – Staying With the Dursleys**

As Harry lay on his bed at the Dursley's house, holding a book above him reading, he grinned. He'd been back for one day, and things were going great. He thought back to his entrance.

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Uncle Vernon insisted on going into the house first, and Harry listened in.

"Petunia, Dudley, you've got to leave the freak alone."

"But he's..." shouted Dudley.

"If we don't his freaky godfather will come and kill us all, and then probably eat us!" Both Petunia and Dudley paled as Harry held back his laughter as he listened at the door.

"What about his chores?" asked Petunia.

"No chores," grumbled Vernon.

"What!" screamed Petunia. "That freeloader..."

"His godfather will be paying us for his food, not nearly enough, and he might do his own cooking, but it's the best I could do with that freak. Harry's been told to hex us if we bother him, and you know what a delinquent he is! He'll do it! And knowing how stupid he is, he'll probably mess up and hurt us worse than he wants!"

Dudley chuckled, "What if he can't really hex us at all? If he hasn't learned enough yet?"

At that point Harry walked in and pulled out his wand, pointing it straight at Dudley. "Do you want to test that, Dudders?"

"You will not hurt Dudley!" shouted Petunia as she moved in between Dudley and Harry.

Harry grinned at her. "But it seems I need to do a demonstration to prove what I can do to Dudley." He looked around and saw a big picture of Dudley hanging on the wall and pointed his wand at it. "Accio picture!" he said, causing the photo to float toward him. "Reducto!" he shouted when it was three feet from him.

Everybody flinched as the photo and frame were broken. Dudley's eyes were wide with fear as his face paled. Vernon's face was purple, but he managed to say, "Your godfather will pay for that."

Harry pointed his wand at the picture and said "Reparo," causing the frame and photo to be fixed except that one of Dudley's teeth in the picture seemed to be missing. Harry chuckled. "I guess I'm not so good at fixing things as breaking them. In fact, I don't know a thing about healing spells, except that a lot of the kids I fought last year had to go to the hospital wing and get them. That particular curse is worse than a gunshot wound. If I shot that at your head or heart, you would die. If I shot it at one of your limbs, you'd lose that limb. I do know lesser hexes, and would probably use one of them as your first warning, but I don't want you under the impression that I can't kill you easily if you get me mad enough."

"Y-y-you will not threaten us," said Vernon shakily.

Harry grinned confidently. He was enjoying this. "Of course not. I have no intention of threatening any of you. If you bother me, I'll simply hex you without warning. All I want is to be left alone for the six weeks I have to stay here."

"Fine," shouted Petunia, "but you will cook your own meals and only when we're not in the kitchen! And you'll eat in your room!"

"Actually, I think that it would be better if we work out a schedule of when I can use the kitchen. Otherwise one of you might get the idea to stay in the kitchen all the time so that I can never eat." He then grinned. "Of course, I wouldn't put up with that anyway, but I think it would be simpler just to avoid that unpleasantness."

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Harry chuckled to himself at how easily they capitulated and allowed him three hours per day to rule the kitchen (one for breakfast, lunch, and dinner). The times were after the Dursleys normally ate, but he didn't mind that. He now had two goals, and he was studying his books to accomplish them. First he would do something about his room, and then he would learn to disguise himself. Even if he was only spending six weeks here, he still wanted to be comfortable. He knew there were ways to magically make rooms larger, and he felt he was good enough to transfigure some of the furniture if he had more room to fit what he wanted. He also needed to insure privacy in his room. Then he wanted to be able to change his appearance so he could leave the house without being recognized.

He got up with a start as he heard a loud crash coming from outside. He ran to his window, grabbing his wand off his desk. He looked outside and saw a woman who was partially covered by an invisibility cloak that had slipped. She was sprawled along the ground next to a garbage can that she had apparently knocked down. Because of the cloak, Harry knew immediately that this must be a witch, probably a Death Eater after him. He pointed his wand toward the figure and muttered, "Stupefy!" stunning the woman. He ran outside his room ignoring the Dursleys complaints about his interrupting their television program and ran out the door to his stalker.

Upon approaching her, he made sure no one was watching and magically bound her with ropes. He then took the invisibility cloak away from her and received a shock as the face of Tonks was revealed. He chuckled to himself, supposing that Sirius had sent the auror-in-training to guard him. He pulled her into his privacy-fenced in back yard and finally stepped about three feet from her, pointed his wand and said, "Enervate."

"What? Damn!" she said, looking around as her face turned red. "I am never going to live this down," she said, starting to laugh. "Wotcher, Harry."

"Hello Tonks," he said, joining her laughter as he helped her up. "What are you doing here? Did Sirius send you to guard me?"

“Actually, Professor Dumbledore did,” she said hanging her head down. “How can I be an auror if a twelve year old boy can take me out?”

“I’m nearly thirteen!” he said defensively.

“Fine, if a thirteen year old boy can stun me!”

“You’d fallen down. I’m sorry about that. You were partially covered by the cloak so I couldn’t see who you were.”

“I’m too clumsy! I’m tripping all the time. But Harry, don’t apologize. An unknown witch was spying on you. You did the right thing by stunning me. If a Death Eater had caught me, they’d have done much worse than that.”

“We can keep this our little secret,” said Harry with a smirk. “Has there always been someone watching me?”

“Since you got back, yes. The headmaster wants to make sure nothing happens to you, aside from being entertained by clumsy auror trainees, that is.” She then closed her eyes in concentration and enlarged her ears, turned her nose and hair red, and a few other things to make her look like a clown.

Harry laughed. “That sure is an amazing ability you were born with, Tonks! How did you find out you had it? Is there some sort of a test magical kids get?”

“Nothing special like that, Harry. It’s just plain and simple accidental magic.”

“Accidental magic?”

“Yep. When I was seven years old, my mum decided to cut my hair herself, and messed up badly, and the next day, I was supposed to go to school the next day. My dad – a muggle – insisted that I get an education at muggle school instead of being home-schooled like most witches. He felt it would help me to understand muggles, and he was right. Anyway, I was terrified of the kids teasing me about my hair when I went to bed that night. The next morning, my hair looked as

though my mum never cut it. When she saw it, she was so excited and explained what a metamorphmagus was. They then got me a book to read and a tutor so I had Saturday school as well.”

That story sounded very familiar to Harry as he listened. When she was finished, he told her why. “When I was very young, Aunt Petunia pretty much cut all my hair off except for my bangs to cover my scar. I knew I’d get teased about it, and the next morning it was back to normal. As a matter of fact, I haven’t had a haircut since then.”

Tonks was shocked and excited. “Why didn’t you tell me that before?”

“I didn’t know it might mean something, and I haven’t thought about it in years. I got in trouble for it.”

She sighed. “With these people, I’m not surprised. Why don’t we see what you can do? Close your eyes and concentrate on growing your hair.”

Harry closed his eyes and did as he was told. Thirty seconds later, Harry could feel his hair growing down past his neck. His eyes were still closed when he heard Tonks say, “Now put it back how it was.”

When he did that, Tonks happily congratulated him and gave him some exercises to do to learn better control. She also promised to bring him a book to read the next time she guarded him.

“I appreciate that, Tonks. Oh and, er, could you keep this a secret for now? I’ll tell a few people like Sirius, but I don’t want Moldishorts to find out about it. I want to be very careful about who knows about it. This ability might prove very useful. You can tell the other guards that I’ve learned a few cosmetic charms and I’m going to go outside in disguise from now on.”

-

Over the next few days, Harry learned how to change his hair color, eye color, and even skin color as he also learned how to charm his room to be bigger. He was amazed at how much he could learn at home when he didn’t have chores to do all day. He settled into a routine.

He'd wake up early, change his appearance (to a new one every day) and sneak outside wearing his cloak (so the neighbors wouldn't see a new boy leave the Dursleys every morning). He'd pocket his cloak a few blocks away (a location he'd told Tonks about so they could follow him). Then he'd go jogging around the neighborhood for about a half hour. When he was done jogging, he'd exercise in the nearby park (sit-ups, push-ups, jumping jacks, and several others that he'd learned in muggle school gym). After he was done, he'd sneak home, make himself breakfast, and take it up to his room.

When he was done eating, he'd shower and then spend a few hours each day working on homework. Then he'd make himself lunch and work on defense spells. In his newly enlarged room, he made himself moving targets that he'd practice shooting spells at for speed and accuracy. He'd also work on learning new spells. It was hard to practice dodging without an opponent, but just getting the target to move was hard enough for Harry. He couldn't make it fight back. He was afraid he'd get rusty before the six weeks were over. He decided to ask Sirius to duel him every visit.

After that he'd make himself dinner and then practice his morphing and any other spell that wasn't directly related to fighting. When he was done with that, he'd beat up a broken toy he'd transfigured into a punching bag until he was tired enough to go to sleep.

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The next day, Tonks showed up with the book she promised, and Harry decided to ask her (in addition to Sirius) to duel him for an hour on the days she watched him.

"I don't think the Dursleys would fancy me waltzing into their house every few days."

"You could use your cloak. You could tell me when you're here while I'm jogging, and then I could let you in the house."

"Well, I guess so."

After he snuck her into his now gym-sized room, they dueled for an hour. At first she was going easy on him until he hit her with a stinger.

“Tonks, I’m trying to be ready for Death Eaters, not first years, to attack me.”

“Sorry, Harry. It won’t happen again.”

After that, she started showing him what auror training is all about. She was surprised at how well he did, but in the end, she managed to beat him.

“You see,” said Harry after Tonks helped him up, “My catching you off guard the other day was a fluke.”

“No, you got me fair and square then, and you did a great job now. There’s just a few things you need to improve.” At that point she gave him a list of things to work on, which included hiding your intentions from your opponent while reading theirs.

-

Two days later, a Sunday, Harry had just gotten back after jogging. When he reached the door to his room, he saw that Dudley was inside looking around, with a picture of Harry standing between Ginny and Hermione in his hand. He hadn’t noticed his cousin was back yet. Harry decided to have some fun. He pulled out his wand and pointed it at Dudley’s rear end and muttered a spell. A pig’s tail once again grew out of his trousers.

“Ahhhh!” screamed Dudley, dropping the picture as his hands went to his tail.

“Accio, picture,” shouted Harry before the picture hit the ground.

Dudley turned with a terrified look on his face. “You...you...I’ll tell mum and dad!”

“They told you to stay out of my room! Wingardium Leviosa!” Dudley began to float around the room. “Tell me why I shouldn’t send you out the window, Dudders.”

Dudley was actually shaking and crying. Harry could swear he smelled something awful. “I,I,I’m sorry, Harry. I shouldn’t have...”

“No you shouldn’t have gone in my room, you shouldn’t have picked on me or stopped people at school from being my friend! As far as I’m concerned, you shouldn’t live.” Dudley gulped. “But killing you would be a lot of paperwork, so I’ll let you off with a warning.” Dudley fell to the ground, hard. “Oh yes,” said Harry, as he removed the tail. “Since the muggles doctors can remove it anyway, I might as well take it away. I’ll have to consider what to do to you that they can’t cure. Until then, this will do.” He then gave Dudley a bat-bogey hex.

Dudley ran out of there as fast as his body could go, which wasn’t very fast, trying to escape the bat bogies. Harry then got a stroke of brilliance. He waited about fifteen minutes, and then he transfigured his clothes and changed himself into Vernon. He then took off his belt. He silenced the hallway so no one would hear what was going on. He walked up to Dudley’s door and kicked it in.

“DUDLEY! YOU WENT INTO THE FREAK’S ROOM WHEN I TOLD YOU NOT TO!”

Dudley was now shaking worse than ever. The bat bogies were gone, but there was a mess on the floor that appeared to be their remains. The only times Dudley had seen his father like this, Harry had been the object of Vernon’s anger. “D,Daddy?”

“DON’T YOU DADDY ME! THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU DISOBEY ME! I’VE LET YOU GET AWAY WITH FAR TOO MUCH ALREADY! THIS IS THE LAST STRAW! DO YOU WANT THE FREAK TO KILL US ALL?”

“N,no Daddy!”

“I’m gonna make sure it never happens again!” he said, holding the belt in his hands like a treasure.

“No! No! No Daddy! You can’t! You only do that to Harry!”

“Now I’m doing it to you!”

“P-please, I’ll do anything....er.....even chores.”



Harry/Vernon took about a minute to contemplate it. "Fine! You are to get up at five a.m. and trim the hedges, mow the lawn, with our old manual lawnmower. I don't want the motor of the new one to wake me or the neighbors up. I want the garage cleaned out and the car washed and waxed! And vacuumed out, too! Then I want you to clean the bathroom, then the kitchen, and then the living room! All without waking anybody up! If you wake me up, you'll get a worse beating than I would have given you before!"

"Y-y-yes dddddaddy."

"Oh, and don't you DARE tell your mother about this! You're going to do it every day, and we're going to pretend that you're doing it voluntarily and I'm surprised by it. I might even offer you a reward to keep your mother happy! If I do, refuse it no matter how much I insist! I may even say that you don't have to do chores anymore. If I do, you are to insist that you want to, and that you enjoy it! You won't talk to me about it! I'll talk to you a few times to remind you! But if you ever forget to do it, I will beat you until you wish you'd never been born!"

"YYYesss daddy."

Harry/Vernon turned around and walked out the door, slamming it behind him. He removed the silencing charm from the hall and walked into his room, silencing the door. He changed back and laughed his head off.

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All that day Dudley was nervously acting casual around his parents, and early the next morning Harry heard his cousin sneak down the stairs and start working. After Dudley finished exhausted, he got praise as Harry expected. Vernon even tried to give him money, but Dudley insisted that he enjoyed doing the chores. That night, Vernon/Harry said Dudley did a great acting job, but didn't do the chores nearly good enough. Dudley, trembling, insisted he'd do better if he wasn't beaten. Harry/Vernon told him he'd have to do this every summer until he moves out, and that he'll only visit if there's a problem with the chores.

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Finally, six days after Harry arrived, Sirius Black showed up and knocked at the door. Harry listened from the hall while Dudley rested from his chores in his room. He could hear how shaky his uncle's voice was as he said, "C-Come in Mr. Black."

"So," said Sirius, "How's Harry."

"H-he's fine. No problems at all."

"We'll see."

"D-do you have the m-money with you?"

"Here, Dursley," Sirius growled. "Now I'm going to spend some time with Harry."

Harry went back in his room as Sirius made his way up the stairs and knocked on Harry's door. "Who is it?" asked Harry, pretending he wasn't spying.

"It's Voldemort. Can I come in?"

"Sure, as long as you promise not to avada kadavra me before saying hello properly."

"Alright, I'll just crucio you first."

"That's fine. Come in Padfoot."

The door opened and Sirius gave Harry a hug. After he closed the door and silenced it, he looked around. "Impressive work. Did you do that yourself?"

"Yes. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia can't stand it, but I think Dudley wants me to do it to his room," Harry laughed.

"So, how are they treating you?"

"They're dead scared to do anything to me since I demonstrated a reducto curse on one of Dudley's pictures, so they pretty much let me do what I please."

Sirius grinned. "Tonks says she's helping your dueling abilities."

"Yes, she's great. I don't want to get rusty without a dueling partner. I also wanted to ask you to help me with that before you leave."

"Sure cub. Anything else going on? Have your girlfriends sent you any letters?"

Harry made a face. "Since they're not my girlfriends, then no. My nonexistent girlfriends haven't written me."

"Fine. Have any of your friends written you?"

"Yes. Both Ginny and Hermione have sent me two letters so far. Ron said hi in one of Ginny's letters. I wrote them both back. That's why Hedwig's not here." He then took a deep breath and smiled. "Tonks and I found out something interesting." He then closed his eyes and his hair turned black. He started getting taller as his face and the rest of his body changed shape. Sirius watched silently in wonder as his godson, over the course of about two minutes, changed into him.

"I'm a metamorphmagus. I was talking to Tonks about how she discovered it, and her story reminded me of something that happened long ago. Once I started trying, I found I was pretty good at it. It still takes me longer than Tonks, but I have been able to make every change I've attempted. I was at first only changing my hair length and color, as well as my eye and skin color, until she gave me the book. It told me about all the other possibilities like changing size and shape. I can literally become anyone I want. I told Ginny and Hermione about it, and Hermione said that she thinks that stigmatism, which is what's wrong with my eyes, is caused because my eyes aren't shaped exactly right. She's going to study that and see if it's true. If it is, I'm gonna try to correct my vision."

Sirius' eyes went wide. "Wow! That's incredible!"

Harry/Sirius grinned ear to ear. "This is a secret from everyone besides the ones who already know. I have to limit my jogging disguise to only what can be done with simple cosmetic charms. Basically color changes."

“Good idea. Oh, and be careful when you mess with your eyes. Make sure you can undo whatever you try.”

“Of course. If Hermione’s right about this, I’m gonna read all I can about eyes before I try it. In the mean time, I’m practicing changing in general so that my speed can improve.” He then chuckled and closed his eyes, changing into Voldemort. Sirius was surprised by that one.

“Aside from your glasses and clothes, you look exactly like him. It’s scary.”

“Maybe I should go find Lucius Malfoy and order him to kill himself.” Harry smiled. “Better yet, to crucio himself.”

Sirius laughed. “We know that they’ll chop off their own hands for him. They’ll probably do that, too.”

“Yes, I got Dudley to start doing chores with this ability. I pretended to be Uncle Vernon.”

Sirius chuckled. “You did? Tell me about it.”

By the time Harry had finished explaining it Sirius was rolling over the floor with laughter. “Can I please tell Tonks about this? You are truly the son of James Potter!”

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The weeks went by quickly, and Dudley was still faithfully doing his chores. He was actually losing some weight, and was too exhausted to hang out with his gang much. Every few weeks, Harry/Vernon would yell at Dudley to keep him motivated.

Harry had found out Hermione was right about stigmatism, and she’d sent him a huge book on eyes (shrunk so an owl could carry it). Fortunately, he found there were only two chapters he had to read. One was on the way the eye basically works and the other was on stigmatism. It took him four weeks before he felt he understood the material. He could only read it for about a half hour before his mind was spinning. Then he’d take a ten minute break from it. Now it was a

week before he could leave the Dursleys, and he was about to try his eye experiment.

He got a picture in his mind of a perfect eye, and felt (using a technique he'd read in his morph book) internally how his left eye was shaped. He then concentrated on changing his eye to match the perfectly shaped eye. When he opened his left eye and closed his right, he smiled as he realized that he was seeing perfectly out of that eye. He then cleared his thoughts and did the same thing with his right eye.

He was thrilled to death that he could finally see! He couldn't stand wearing glasses, especially when he was exercising, and now he was free from them. As he'd told the few people who knew about this, he was planning to tell everyone he was wearing contact lenses that Sirius bought him. For the first time in his life, he excitedly wrote a letter without wearing glasses. Then he wrote a few more and sent them all out with Hedwig.

-

He soon received a congratulatory letter from both Hermione and Ginny. Both Sirius and Tonks saw him the day after he corrected his vision and they had a small celebration with a cake and ice cream. Sirius teased, "Now your girlfriends will like you even more without glasses."

Harry turned his reddening face into Voldemort's and said in his best imitation of his voice, "They are not my girlfriends!"

"Now Sirius, you shouldn't tease him. He could become a troll and bash your head in," said Tonks.

"Fine, I'm sorry, cub."

"Good. How are things going between you and your girlfriend? Have you proposed yet?" Now Sirius' face turned red as Tonks laughed.

"No. I, er..."

Harry (who'd changed himself back to normal) said, "Do you love her?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

"Does she love you?"

"Er, yeah, but that doesn't..."

"Are you old enough to marry?"

"Well..."

"Have you known each other long enough?"

"I..."

"Do you want to break up with her?"

"No. It's just I'm..."

"Scared?" supplied Tonks, who'd been staying silent as Harry questioned Sirius.

"I'm not scared!"

"Good," said Tonks with a smile, "Let me help you pick out the ring."

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After a little more teasing, Tonks finally had to leave. Afterwards, Sirius chastised Harry for initiating that round of teasing. Harry said, "Turnabout is fair play. Whenever you tease me about my friends, I'll tease you about marriage."

"Fine. I was gonna tell you about a little hunting expedition me and Dumbledore went on, but now I'm gonna make you wait until you leave here."

Harry brightened up. "You went with Dumbledore? What happened? You've got to tell me!"

Sirius sighed. "I really think you'll be better off waiting until you can see it in my pensieve next week. If I tell you about it, that'll spoil it."

"Fine," he said, agreeing that he'd rather watch it than just hear about it, even if he had to wait a week. "Are you and Dumbledore alright?"

Sirius sighed. "We're fine."

-

A few days later, while Harry was bringing his food from the kitchen, Petunia finally noticed that Harry wasn't wearing glasses. "Boy, er, Harry," said Petunia, "Why aren't you wearing glasses?"

Harry kept with his story. "Sirius bought me contact lenses. He brought them with on my last visit. I'd ordered them before."

"Fine."

"Oh, by the way, Sirius is coming over Tuesday to pick me up until next summer."

"Good," she said, "Aunt Marge will be coming over in a few weeks. She'll be glad not to see you."

"I'll be even gladder not to see her!" Harry continued carrying his breakfast up the stairs.

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Harry/Vernon paid Dudley one last visit the night before Harry left, insulting his work and reminding him to keep up the chores for the rest of his childhood, and to refuse the gifts from Aunt Marge, claiming he doesn't deserve them. Harry wondered how long Dudley would keep working.

The next morning, Sirius showed up while Dudley was still working in the yard and stopped himself from laughing out loud. He went up to Harry's room, and together they removed all the charms in the room. Harry had already packed and shrunk his trunk. He'd finished his homework the night before, so he could spend the rest of the summer

without that to worry about. Sirius grabbed Harry by the hand, and they apparated away.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 14 – Good Dreams**

“Harry!” he heard as he was tackled into a big hug by a girl with bushy brown hair.

He hugged her back. “Hello Hermione. It’s great to see you!”

“It’s great to see you too!” she said, backing up as Harry’s cheeks became slightly pink.

Before he could respond, he was pulled into another big hug by a certain red-haired girl. “Hello, Harry! I’ve missed you so much!” she said before kissing him on the cheek.

“I’ve missed you too Ginny. Both of you.”

“So,” said the redhead backing up and looking intently at him. “Are you gonna show us?”

“Show you what?”

“Honestly, Harry,” said Hermione. “What you’ve written us about. The way you tricked Dudley.”

Harry smiled. “Oh. You want to see that.”

“Of course!” the girls said together.

Sirius laughed. “Looks like you’re gonna have to change forms for your girlfriends. They’re not happy with how you look now.”

Both girls paled. “No, that’s not it!” said Ginny winking, “You look really good!”

“Yes,” said Hermione, “Especially without your glasses.”

Harry’s cheeks turned red at that statement. He decided to give them a show. He closed his eyes and changed his face to look like Hermione’s, and gave himself long, Weasley red hair that looked just like Ginny’s. The girls giggled at that appearance, which didn’t really look right, and then Harry switched to Ginny’s face with Hermione’s hair. The girls and Sirius laughed at that.

“Can’t you change your whole body?” asked Ginny.

Harry, still with Ginny’s face, blushed as brightly as the youngest Weasley ever had. “Er, I’d, well, have to do, um, research to make sure everything Sirius laughed out loud. The girls blushed. Harry hid his head.

Hermione finally said, “You don’t need to do research in that area anytime soon.”

“I, er, didn’t say I was.” Deciding to change the subject, Harry lifted his head. “How’s your summer been? Hermione, when are you leaving for your holiday?”

“Trying to get rid of me already?” she asked with a wink, which caused Harry to blush just a bit more.

“No, no. I just know how much you were looking forward to visiting France. You made it sound so interesting; I wished I was going with you.”

“Me too,” said Ginny, “You’re SO lucky! I wish my family was going on a vacation.”

“Then you’d be leaving me too,” said Harry with a fake pout as he changed back to his normal form.

“Well,” said Hermione sadly, “I’m leaving tomorrow morning. I’m sorry that I won’t be here for your birthday. Maybe I’ll be able to floo like last year.”

“I hope so,” said Harry, looking her straight in the eyes.

Ginny grabbed Harry’s hand and pulled him to the sitting room. “Why don’t we get more comfortable and talk? I’ll bet you can do a lot better faces than that. Why don’t you become your uncle?”

“All right,” he said, allowing himself to be led away. “I’ll have to transfigure my clothes first, though...”

Harry entertained them for about an hour while Sirius went to his room. He did funny faces, as well as scary faces and they acted funny scenes out. He became Voldemort with his breathing problem, attempting to dance a ballet while wearing a pink ballerina outfit. Then he became Snape wearing a white wedding dress.

-

The girls stayed with him all day, although after lunch they all (including Sirius) went to the Burrow for a Quidditch game. After the match, Sirius, Harry, Hermione, and the four youngest Weasleys were on their way to the pond when Ginny exclaimed, "Look at that owl!"

There was a snowy owl that looked similar to Hedwig flying toward a window at the Burrow, but the letter it was carrying was very colorful and had a red bow on it. They turned around to find out what it was and who it was from. When they got in the house, they saw Mrs. Weasley sitting on the couch appearing to be in shock, staring at the letter she was holding in front of her in disbelief.

"What is it, Mum?" asked Ron.

"It...it was from the Daily Prophet. It seems we won their Grand Prize Galleon Draw!" she said excitedly.

"That's wonderful!" said Harry as a genuine smile crossed his face. The others expressed similar sentiments.

"Well," said the very happy Weasley matriarch, "We're going to have a special supper tonight!"

Everyone was volunteered to help the preparation, whether they were cooking or setting up tables outside. Even Percy was dragged out of his room by Molly and forced to help, although he glared at Harry every chance he got. Harry, who knew that the git blamed him for losing his chance to be Head Boy, grinned back. "I wonder who the head boy will be," said Fred.

"I know someone in our family made it to that exalted position," said George.

"We all thought that Percy..."

"...who's got a bigger head than anyone..."

"...would've made it. But instead..."

"...he thought he'd enjoy watching little girls getting beaten up by Slytherins."

"Now boys," said Molly, not sounding very sincere, "stop reminding your brother of his foolish decision. Hopefully he's learned from it."

"He hasn't," said Ginny. "Judging by how much he's been glaring at Harry."

Percy scowled at his sister. "I have not."

"How 'bout if I not hex you the way you've not been glaring at Harry?" said Ginny with a look that even scared Percy.

"Fine!" said Percy as he set the last dishes on the table and stormed back to his room.

"You need to be easier on Percy. He's got to come around on his own."

"He's not coming around. He simply thinks Harry stopped him from being head boy, and that's the end of the world for him. He genuinely thinks he did right."

Mrs. Weasley sighed. "Hopefully one day he'll come around, but nagging him all the time won't help. I want you to leave him alone."

"Honestly guys," said Harry, who'd been silent, "His glares don't bother me a bit." Then he added with a smirk, "If they did, I'd give him another black eye."

"Harry-dear," said Mrs. Weasley, half-yelling, half-laughing, "I'd really rather you didn't. It's rather inconvenient to look up the spell for fixing that."

Ron said, "Harry didn't say you had to heal it."

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A little while later, Arthur Weasley's hand on the clock changed from work to traveling to home. The door opened and Mr. Weasley cheerfully said, "Good evening Weasleys!" After he took a look around he added, "Good evening Sirius, Harry, and Hermione."

At that moment, Molly, with a big smile on her face, gave him a hug, along with a passionate kiss that shocked Harry and Hermione, who'd never seen those two kiss before.

"Oi! Mum, dad, get a room!" said a disgusted Ron.

They separated and ignored their youngest son while Mrs. Weasley said, "Do you remember that Daily Prophet contest we entered last month?"

"Of course, Molly. Did we win a few Galleons?"

"We won the Grand Prize!"

Arthur fainted on the spot.

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After a quick 'enervate,' Mr. Weasley was back on his feet. They had dinner in the back yard as was planned while they discussed what to do with the winnings. Percy suggested saving it but was quickly shut up. In the end, the Weasleys decided to visit their oldest son Bill in Egypt, since they visited Charlie in Romania on their last vacation.

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When Hermione was about to floo home, Harry made sure to hug her goodbye and say, "Have a good trip. I'll miss you," and quickly kissed her on the cheek, causing both of them to blush.

Hermione threw down her handful of floo powder. "Granger residence." She disappeared.

“Harry,” said Ginny with a strange look in her eyes. She ran up to him and embraced him. “I’m gonna miss you while we’re in Egypt. I’ll make sure to send you a souvenir.” She kissed him on the cheek quickly before letting go of him.

“I’ll miss you too, Ginny, but I’m glad you got your wish. I hope you have a wonderful time in Egypt.”

She smiled at him. “Thanks.”

At that moment, Sirius walked up to them. “I think it’s about time we got back home.”

After they said their goodbyes, they took Harry’s portkey back to Potter Manor.

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That night Harry was happy to be in his own bed. He’d transfigured the one at the Dursleys’ to be a lot better, but it just wasn’t the same as being in his own room in his own house. He was sad that his friends were all going on holiday, but at least he wouldn’t be with his enemies. As he thought about this in his comfortable bed he drifted off to sleep without reinforcing his occlumency shields, as was his custom before bed.

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As he dreamed, he was running through Paris looking for something. He looked in every bookstore, library, and restaurant, but couldn’t find it. He got desperate and started asking everyone he could find if they knew where it was. They asked him what he was talking about, but he didn’t remember. He finally decided to check hotel rooms for it. He had just blasted the first door away when he found himself opening a different door.

He looked around and saw shelves full of thought spheres. Harry knew he’d been in this place before and felt excitement that he knew wasn’t his own. He had to pause for a minute to catch his breath. The walk had been a bit tiring for him. He looked around to see that two uniformed Death Eaters were standing beside him waiting patiently,

knowing that if they complained they would soon regret it. He started walking again, and he soon approached the sphere labeled,

‘S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D.

Dark Lord

and (?) Harry Potter’

The excitement that Harry was feeling reached a new level as he grabbed the thought sphere in triumph and then activated it with his wand. A ghostly figure rose up above the sphere. It was a twelve-year-old boy with messy raven-colored hair, green eyes, and glasses. Harry felt Voldemort’s anger upon seeing this. He started breathing very heavily.

“Hey Tom! I thought you might want to find out why you can’t kill me! It’s because you’re a worthless piece of Slytherin crap! A cowardly murderer who tries to kill babies! Here are the exact contents of the prophecy.” The figure then flipped him off with both hands. “You may be interested to know that I destroyed the sphere with the prophecy. Bye for now Tom, I can’t wait to kill you!” This time the rage woke Harry up just as the thought sphere was shattered.

Harry screamed as his scar felt like it was on fire. He instinctively put his hand over the lightning bolt. He closed his eyes and silently began working on his occlumency, reinforcing his shields. Within five minutes, he was feeling better, and was able to laugh at Voldy’s anger over his new ‘prophecy.’ He was surprised that Voldemort had risked going to the department of mysteries himself, but then he guessed that someone must have told him that only he and Harry would be able to touch it. Chuckling, he wondered if he could get Riddle out of breath when they finally fought, as the beginnings of a strategy formed in his mind. He determined to make sure that he was in the best possible shape he could be in, so he decided to increase the distance that he ran every day.

-

The next morning when Sirius came down to breakfast, he found Harry already eating.

“Couldn’t wait for the old man, huh?”

“My exercise gets me hungry. Last night, I fell asleep without working on my occlumency, and had the best Voldemort dream ever!”

“What?” said Sirius in disguise, “How could a Voldemort dream be good?”

“He went to the department of mysteries and retrieved my prophecy.”

Sirius laughed. “What did he think of it?”

Harry faked a hurt expression. “I don’t think he liked it. He was smashing it when I woke up.”

“Well, I hope he didn’t destroy the building or something out of fury.”

“Na. I think he was about to crucio his two buddies. He didn’t want to waste time there, but he did have to take at least one break to catch his breath.”

“Well, I guess he didn’t have a good night then.”

At that moment an owl flew into the house delivering the morning paper. The front page had an article about random Death Eater attacks of muggles, but the article that caught Sirius’ attention wasn’t about that. “Hey Harry, come take a look at this.”

“What is it?”

“Dumbledore’s passed the new school policies. It basically says that whenever a student is injured, they, along with every witness, will be given veritaserum in front of Dumbledore and all the heads of house and asked how they were hurt. If it is found that another student injured them, that student will be brought in and questioned under veritaserum as well. If it was intentional or while harassing the victim, the guilty party will be sent home for the rest of the year and have to retake it if they return, even if the term was almost over. If the injuries are life-threatening, the ministry will be apprised as well, and may choose to prosecute the bully to whatever extent the law allows given



the circumstances, especially if they're of age. If they ever do it again, they will be expelled."

Harry brightened up, but then frowned. "But what about if we defend someone and hurt others in the process?"

Sirius smiled. "It also says that defense of self or others will never result in punishment again. As long as the Slytherin either hexed or hit someone first. Also, they'll request pensieve memories of the incident as well. Just don't hurt them after they're down. You may wish to stick with stunning and body-binds that don't actually harm people if possible."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Hey Sirius, you never told me about the Horcrux hunt."

Sirius smiled. "I wondered when you'd ask me again."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 15 – Harry's Birthday**

A few minutes later, Harry and Sirius were in the library of Potter Manor, entering a pensieve that Padfoot claimed to have recently removed from his family vault. They leaned into it.

Harry looked around and saw memory Dumbledore and Sirius walking in between some trees. He followed them and soon realized that they were heading toward an old shack, the same shack he'd seen in Dumbledore's pensieve where Voldemort's family had lived. When they reached the door, Harry saw what appeared to be the skeleton of a snake nailed to it and realized that it had never been removed. The door opened, and the inside was completely full of dust and cobwebs. Before stepping inside, both Dumbledore and Sirius performed the bubblehead charm on themselves.

Once inside, Harry watched as Dumbledore performed some sort of spells, pointing his wand in every direction as he said to his companion, "I believe that if a Horcrux is located here it will be hidden. There." Harry didn't see any indication of why the headmaster believed he'd found something, but the aged professor pointed his wand at a certain place in the center of the floor and nonverbally scourgified it. As the thick dust began to disappear, Harry realized that there was a thin, old gray floor mat there. As soon as Harry realized this, it was levitated and tossed to the side, revealing an approximately two square foot section on the wooden floor that appeared to be a trap door.

Sirius pointed his wand at the square and said, "Wingardium Leviosa," only to be thrown backward into the wall. He landed in a heap. He shook his head and said, "Well that hurt," as he got up.

"We must exercise caution, Sirius." Dumbledore then performed some incredibly complex wand movements while remaining silent until finally the trapdoor opened inward. The headmaster then looked into the hole and saw an old wooden box. Dumbledore then performed another spell until the box glowed golden for a moment, and he opened it to reveal an ugly gold ring with a large black stone, which Harry recognized as Slytherin's ring.

"Is that it?" asked Sirius.

“Yes indeed, it certainly appears so. Stand back and be prepared to defend against any curses.” Albus then performed a silent spell with his wand pointed at the ring and what appeared to be black beams of light shot at him. Counter spell after spell was performed by the aged wizard, neutralizing black beams with white.

This went on for about fifteen minutes until the ring glowed white. Finally relaxing and slightly panting from the effort, Albus pointed his wand once more and cast a spell directly at the black stone. Harry watched the stone crack as a hideous scream seemed to emanate from it. A gray light shot directly from the stone to the wand that destroyed it, and onto the hand holding the wand. “Ouch,” the professor said calmly, although it was quite obvious that he was in much more pain than he was pretending as his body was flung backwards into a wall. As Sirius watched his now unconscious companion, he saw that Dumbledore’s whole body was beginning to shake as the tips of the fingers on his right hand started to turn black. Instinctively Sirius grabbed the now neutralized ring and then the unconscious man and disappeared with a small pop.

After they left the pensieve, Harry looked at his godfather with a concerned expression on his face. “Is Dumbledore alright?”

Sirius looked down. “He’s pretty much alright, but not quite. That black that formed on his fingers kept spreading until Madam Pomfrey could stop it. It had reached the bottom of his fingers before the spreading was halted. His fingers are now black, dead, and can’t be healed. He can still move them, but it hurts him if someone touches them.” He took a deep breath. “He can still hold his wand. Anyway, he feels that it was an equitable trade.”

-

The next few weeks went by quickly with Harry getting a letter from each of his vacationing friends. He continued his training every day as usual, and one day he woke up and realized with a grin that it was his birthday. After his morning exercise Harry went to breakfast to see Padfoot was already there. “Morning Harry,” he said.

“Good morning Sirius. Isn’t this a great day?”

"I suppose so. I've got a lunch date with Angela in a few hours, and I've got a few errands to run until then. I've got to go. Will you be alright?"

Harry was a bit shocked and hurt. He had expected his godfather to remember his birthday. "I, I'll be fine. Have. Have fun."

"Dobby is being busy working," said the elf nervously just before popping away.

"See you later cub," he said as he walked toward the floo. "By the way, don't worry about lunch. I'll bring something back with me. In the mean time, I suggest you get some more studying done in your room."

As soon as Sirius was gone, Harry quietly sang, "Happy birthday to me. Happy birthday to me," as he got up and went to his room to study.

-

A few hours later, he was lying in his bed reading a book when he heard some noise downstairs. "Sirius?" he called out, even though he knew it was too early for him to be back from lunch.

There was no reply and the noise seemed to lessen some. After he'd called again with no response, Harry marked his place in the book and walked downstairs holding his wand at the ready.

As he approached the living room, he heard whispering until he walked out there and caught the intruders red-handed. First he saw Hermione standing on a chair hanging one end of a banner the muggle way. His heart skipped a beat and he smiled. The banner said, 'Happy Thirteenth Birthday Harry.' Holding the other side was Ginny. Dobby was also there doing something Harry couldn't determine. Since all three of their backs were to him, Harry quietly left and went back upstairs, not wanting to spoil the surprise.

-

He was standing in front of a mirror practicing looks of shock when he finally heard Sirius call him downstairs at about noon.

“SURPRISE!”

Harry wasn't surprised by the party, but he was surprised at how many guests were there. It was about as many as last year. Sirius, Angela, Remus, Hagrid, Minerva, Albus, Arthur, Molly, Fred, George, Ron, Ginny, Hermione, and Dobby were there. He couldn't help the huge grin that formed on his face as he realized that now he's had a surprise birthday party two years in a row.

After Harry greeted everyone (being hugged by all the females), they had lunch, which consisted of several pizzas Sirius had brought. After that was a cake Mrs. Weasley had helped Ginny make earlier that day. They'd flooed to the Burrow as soon as they woke up in Egypt to get everything ready for the party. “She did all the work, Harry-dear. She's really very good in the kitchen and will someday make a wonderful wife.”

“Mother!” Ginny said blushing.

“Thanks Ginny. It looks wonderful, but you didn't have to go to all that trouble.”

“I wanted to,” said Ginny winking.

Hermione then walked up to them. “That cake does look wonderful, but I believe Harry prefers treacle tarts like these to cake.” Hermione smiled at Harry while holding a box of them that she'd obviously purchased at a bakery. Ginny frowned.

Something about Hermione's smile made Harry a bit light-headed, but he didn't like the fact that she'd just belittled Ginny's hard work. “Hermione,” said Harry appearing upset, “That wasn't very nice, was it? I certainly appreciate Ginny's effort, and if no one has any objections, I'd like to eat that now. I'd like to save the tarts for later.”

Hermione frowned and looked hurt. “Of...of course Harry. I'm sorry Ginny. I shouldn't have said that. Personally, I prefer cake.”

-

After they'd eaten the cake, Harry began opening presents. Sirius gave him a set of Quidditch accessories, which included a broom servicing kit, safety equipment (like gloves), and a compass that clips onto the broom handle. "I warned everybody not to get you Quidditch supplies since I was doing it."

Dobby naturally gave Harry a mismatched pair of socks. Hermione gave him a bottle of some sort of French cologne. "I think it smells nice," she said, causing Harry to blush.

Ron gave Harry a pocket sneakoscope. Remus gave Harry some defense books. Arthur and Molly gave him a model of a pyramid. Ginny gave him a wizard picture of herself riding a camel in a wooden frame that had Egyptian hieroglyphics carved at the bottom. Ginny smiled at Harry. "These symbols mean, 'I rode a camel.'"

Hagrid gave Harry a box of rock cakes he resolved not to eat. McGonagall gave him a book on human transfiguration. Fred and George gave Harry a box of unlabeled candies that Harry wasn't too sure he wanted to try. As he thanked Fred and George, he decided to ask Dobby to inspect them for any pranks. He'd ask Sirius, but he didn't think he could trust the marauder to let him know if the candy was pranked. Angela gave Harry a green dragon hide Irish National Quidditch team jacket with a small wizarding picture of a leprechaun on his heart and a large wizarding picture of the team flying out into a pitch on the back.

While Harry was admiring it, Ron said, "You should've given him a Chudley Canon's jacket."

"That awful team?" asked Angela. "Why would anyone support them? And if they did, why would they admit it in public?" Ron's face turned pink but he remained silent. Angela continued, "Besides, I think the green dragon hide brings out Harry's eyes."

"Yes, it certainly does," said Hermione.

"Everyone expects them to make it to the world cup next year," said Angela, "so hopefully you'll be able to go since England is hosting it."

The jacket is charmed to adjust its size to the person wearing it, so it'll still fit you even if you grow taller like you have since Christmas."

"Thanks a lot!" said Harry happily. "I really like it."

She hugged him. "Happy birthday."

Albus gave Harry an old-looking book called 'Mastering the Elements.' "I'd like you to read the first chapter this week, and then I'd like to discuss it with you."

-

When the party was over and his friends had left, Harry had Dobby inspect the twins' candy while he began reading Dumbledore's book. The first thing the book said was that most people can't learn this type of magic, and that those who can, begin learning at fifteen or sixteen years old. He didn't get much further than that when Dobby popped into his room and said, "Dobby is testing the candy, and Dobby is finding that each piece is either turning the one eating it into a canary or changing their hair or skin or eye color."

Harry laughed. "I'll have fun with those once school starts. I'll bet I can get some Slytherins to eat it, especially Crabbe and Goyle."

He then continued his reading and found out that according to the book, it was possible to learn how to control fire, air, water, and earth from something small like lighting a candle and putting it out to causing hurricanes, fires, and earthquakes. He seriously doubted he'd be able to do any of it. At the end of the chapter was a test to find out how much potential you had, if any. He decided to try it out the next day.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 16 – Controlling the Elements**

As Harry sat down on the floor in the basement, he took one last look at the plate he'd set up ten feet in front of him for his elemental test. In the center was a tall candle that he'd attached using its own wax. On the left of the normal-sized plate was a cup full of soil, and on the right was a cup full of water. According to the book Harry had, every elemental magician would be able to perform the test, and then find out to what extent their control goes with each element.

He nodded, satisfied, and waved his wand, causing the room to go completely dark. He then set his wand down and closed his eyes to help him concentrate. After approximately five minutes, when Harry felt he was calm, he muttered a Latin incantation.

The candle lit, and Harry opened his eyes, which he directed toward the soil. As he stared at it, he muttered something else, and the dirt moved out of the cup onto the plate, forming a one-inch tall barrier around the edge of the plate. Once that was complete, he turned his attention to the glass of water. After muttering another Latin incantation, it seemed to jump out of the glass and onto the middle of the plate, surrounding the bottom of the tall candle. The dirt stopped the water from spilling off the plate. Harry finally looked at the flame and said the last phrase, and it blew out.

The room was pitch black for exactly five seconds until at the same moment several things happened. The candle relit, only this time with a huge flame, three times as large as you would expect from a candle. The flame appeared to be dancing in a wind that Harry could feel blowing through his hair, but the fire wouldn't go out. The soil and the water stayed completely still. As Harry sat there, both the flame and the wind grew stronger and stronger as Harry felt weaker and weaker. Finally, about thirty seconds after it started, it was over, and Harry fell unconscious.

-

"Harry! Harry are you alright?" Harry heard a voice while his eyes were still closed.



He felt extremely drained as he used his arm to force himself to sit up. He opened his eyes. "Si-Sirius?"

"Yes. What were you doing?"

"How long have I been out?"

"I don't know, but you've been down here about three hours. When I got down here, it was dark. After I lit the lanterns, I saw you lying on the floor. Are you alright?"

"I, I'm fine. I'm just a bit tired."

"What were you doing in the dark?"

"A test to see if I can control elements."

"Could you?" said Sirius, his face suddenly full of excitement.

"I'd like to double-check the book, but it looks like I can control fire and air."

-

Sirius followed Harry to his room where he'd kept the book for safe keeping (he didn't want it to catch fire or get drenched). Harry grabbed the book and read.

*"After the candle has gone out the first time, the elemental magician's powers will activate, causing whatever elements they control to react as powerfully as the magician has the potential affect them. Over the first few seconds, the force used will increase until it reaches its maximum potential. After demonstrating the power for approximately thirty seconds, the effects will discontinue. Depending on the amount of power used, the elemental magician may feel slightly drained."*

"But I fainted!" said Harry. "The book didn't say that could happen! And the fire and wind kept increasing until the end of the spell! It didn't stop increasing after a few seconds! What went wrong?"

Sirius looked at Harry in awe. He took a deep breath. "If I had to guess, I'd say that you haven't seen your potential with those two elements, and since you used more power than anyone the writer had heard of, it drained you to the point of fainting."

"But it was only two elements!" argued Harry, "and I'm sure that something went haywire in the spell, not that I'm some super-powerful elemental sorcerer!"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders, not wanting to argue about this. He knew Dumbledore would be by later that week to do it. "How long does the book say it takes an elemental magician to learn how to use their powers to their full potential?"

After Harry checked the book, he frustratedly said, "Anywhere between one and five years, depending on how much power, mental discipline, and time the wizard has."

"Well, we can't do anything about your power. Hopefully your occlumency will help with the mental discipline. Hopefully you can devote enough time to it." Sirius took on a grim expression. "I hate to say it, but you're in a race against Voldemort. He wants to fight you as soon as he can, because he knows that you're growing in power every day, so his odds of survival keep decreasing. You need to be able to beat him when he faces you next. The Order of the Phoenix tries to delay that to help you prepare so that you'll win when that battle comes. Could you imagine if you didn't know this was going to happen?"

"I'd probably be creating excuses for not doing homework over the summer instead of preparing. When I finally faced Voldemort, I'd be completely outclassed and easily killed."

-

Sirius soon asked Harry to give him the pensieve memory of the test so he could watch it. After he'd seen it, Sirius was more convinced than ever that he was right about Harry's powers. Unbeknownst to Harry, he discussed it with Dumbledore that day, even bringing him the memory to observe.

Beyond Harry's training, he was bored with his friends on vacation still. He'd been happy that they'd come for his birthday, but he wished they'd stayed. He was glad that they'd be returning for good – both the Weasleys and the Grangers - on Ginny's birthday. There would be a party at the Burrow – not a surprise one. It would be hard to hide the 'coincidence' that they went home on Ginny's birthday.

-

When Dumbledore arrived to discuss elemental magic, he feigned ignorance and asked Harry, "Did you read the chapter I requested?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, Harry. Would you like to perform the test to determine if you have any elemental control?"

Harry looked down. "I, er, already tried it, but something went wrong."

Albus' eyes twinkled, "Are you saying that the elements didn't respond to you?"

"No, they did, but...it's hard to describe. Let me show you the memory so you can see what I did wrong."

After Harry showed him the memory of setting up and running the test, Dumbledore said merrily, "You did nothing wrong that I could detect. I believe that the spell simply didn't provide enough time for your elements, fire and air, to show their full potential."

Harry's eyes went wide as he began to believe it. "Then Sirius was right. Do I have to run a different test?"

"I don't think that will be necessary," said Dumbledore chuckling. "The point is that you can learn how to control fire and air, and have a lot of potential in both. That means that there's probably no use for either element that I've heard of that you won't be able to do with proper training. Now let's discuss what you learned from the chapter."

After an hour discussion, Dumbledore had Harry begin doing a simple exercise. Lighting a candle and blowing it out. It took Harry fifteen

minutes of heavy concentration to do either. "I expect you to practice for an hour each day. You'll keep doing that until your time improves significantly, and then we'll work on other exercises."

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A week after that was Ginny's birthday, and Harry was happy to have his best friends back for the last few weeks of summer. He also knew that the girls were getting impatient, and he'd have to make a decision soon about which one he wanted to date. When his booklist from Hogwarts came, he found out that he and Hermione would be able to go to Hogsmeade (Sirius signed Harry's permission form), but Ginny was still too young. He wondered if he should let that factor into his decision.

Harry had Dobby organize the prank candy the twins had given him into separate containers based off of the affect on the eater in anticipation of returning to school. Hermione's parents let her stay the last few weeks of the summer at the Burrow, and they were all going to Diagon Alley with Harry and Sirius for school shopping.

The day before the trip, Harry was thinking about this as he sat down to try lighting the candle yet again. He'd been practicing for weeks, and it still took him fifteen minutes to get the thing to light. He had to admit, he was getting frustrated as it took him that long for each step of the process that night, too. He lay in bed and let his thoughts drift to other things as he went to sleep, anticipating his trip to Diagon Alley in the morning.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 17 – Diagon Alley**

“Are the preparations complete?” Harry hissed at the pathetic man kneeling in front of him. He was sitting in a comfortable chair.

“Y-Yes my Lord. We will attack Diagon Alley tomorrow at precisely eleven o’clock. Most students will be there preparing for the new school year, probably buying ‘Potions for Beginners’ as the N.E.W.T. level text.”

Harry felt great excitement at that proclamation. “Now, now Severus. Just because you are no longer teaching that class doesn’t mean it’s not being taught properly. However, after tomorrow there won’t be as many students taking it. How many of my servants will be joining you?”

There will be a total of thirty of us. We’ll be in three groups of ten at different areas. I’ll lead one group, while Lucius and Bellatrix will lead the other two. Lucius will arrive five minutes early to set up wards that only those with Dark Marks can apparate through.”

“Excellent. Have you completed your other assignment?”

For a moment, Harry could see Snape shiver. “No master, we have been unable to locate Lucius’ family so far. They are not at any of the Malfoy properties, and we have been unable to search any Black properties.”

“Crucio!” shouted Harry angrily.

-

Harry shot up out of bed as his left hand went straight for his scar. “Damn! I forgot to do occlumency last night!” He was soaked with sweat and breathing heavily. After sitting in bed for a minute, he muttered, “Might as well use the information. It could save lives.”

He got out of bed and marched straight to Sirius’ room. After knocking loudly on the door for about a minute, he finally heard Sirius’ voice. “What is it? It’s five in the morning! We’re not going to Diagon Alley until ten!”

Harry opened the door and saw Sirius holding a pillow over his head. "I had a Voldemort dream. He's planning to attack Diagon Alley at eleven."

Sirius was now fully awake. "What?"

-

After Harry explained what was happening, Sirius told Harry to stay there while he flooed to Hogwarts. Not having anything else to do, he went straight into his training after reinforcing his Occlumency shields. About a half-hour after he'd finished, Mrs. Weasley, along with her kids and Hermione, flooed into the house.

"Hello Harry-dear," said Mrs. Weasley, trying to cover up her nervousness.

"Hi Mrs. Weasley, everyone. What's going on?"

She took a deep breath. "Professor Dumbledore alerted Minister Bones, and she's sending several members of her 'Life Force' to ambush the Death Eaters. The headmaster is also sending some Order members to help, Sirius included."

"Then I should go too!"

"You'll do no such thing!" yelled Molly, causing Harry to momentarily blanch as he backed away. "That's why he sent me here! He knew you'd want to join the fight!" Her countenance changed back to normal, and she walked up to hug Harry. "I know you want to help, and that you've been given special training, but Professor Dumbledore doesn't want word of your abilities to get to You-Know-Who. Right now, he knows you're good at defense, but not how good. Besides, if you show up there, every Death Eater will target you."

For a moment, Harry thought about arguing with her, or even tricking her with his morphing abilities, but was pulled from this train of thought by Hermione, who like Ginny, had stayed silent up until this point.

"Harry, why don't we just go upstairs?"

"Yeah," said Ginny solemnly, "You'll never win this argument."

Mrs. Weasley smiled at the girls and turned back to Harry. "Harry-dear, you really should listen to them. By the way, Sirius is buying your school supplies before the ambush, and he'll send them here as soon as he's got them."

"Then why can't we go before..."

"Just in case they change their attack time," interrupted Molly, "We don't want you there."

"Fine," he said, though his ears were red. He turned around and walked to his room, followed by the girls.

-

"So Harry," said Hermione when they got into his room, "Did Sirius sign your Hogsmeade permission form?"

Harry half-smiled. "Yes, believe it or not, he does trust me to go there." Neither Harry nor Hermione saw Ginny's momentary frown.

The brunette girl sighed. "That's not what I meant. I was, er, wondering if we'd be going there together."

Harry looked at Hermione and then at Ginny as his mood changed. "I guess I have to choose whether to stay in the castle with Ginny or go into town with Hermione." He chuckled. "Or go into town alone." He took a deep breath. "You've both been really patient with me, haven't you?"

Both girls smiled and nodded.

"I, this is very difficult for me. You are both such wonderful girls. Ginny and Hermione, you are both very pretty and smart and many other good things, and any bloke would be lucky to date either of you." He sighed. "Remember your agreement to stay friends no matter which one of you incredible girls that I choose." He was doing his best to compliment them both to avoid them getting mad and hexing him.

“Yes,” said the girls together.

He took another deep breath. “For now, mainly because of the Hogsmeade weekends,” he said as Ginny’s face fell, “and, well, a few things I’ve been feeling lately, I, er, think it would be best, um. This is hard for me to say because I don’t want to hurt either of your feelings. Hermione, will you be my girlfriend, and Ginny, will you still be my best friend.”

Harry saw a solitary tear fall down Ginny’s cheek. She said, “I, yes, we’ll still be friends, but I need some time alone.”

“We’ll be here when you’re ready to talk,” said Hermione, whose face had stayed neutral, “We both do care about you.”

“I know,” she said as she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Harry turned to Hermione and looked at her expectantly. “So, you didn’t answer my question.”

Hermione blushed lightly and smiled. “Of course I’ll be your girlfriend. I just didn’t want to act too happy around Ginny. I know how I’d feel in her place, and wouldn’t want her rubbing it in. It is more practical to date me. After all, if you’re going to Hogsmeade with me, everyone will say we’re dating anyway.”

“That’s not the only reason I picked you,” he said, looking in her eyes.

“Oh,” she said, blushing more.

“Don’t get me wrong, both you and Ginny are great, but lately I’ve been, er, having feelings for you that I haven’t had so much for her. You may have noticed.”

“Well, kind of, but I thought it was my imagination. You know, wishful thinking.”

Harry took a deep breath. “So, how are we gonna handle this?” he said, taking her hand in his as they sat across from each other.



She looked from their hands to his face, smiling. "Well, I think we should take things slow. We are only thirteen, after all."

"You'll be fourteen in a month."

She giggled slightly, "And I expect my boyfriend to be generous with my birthday gift. Just kidding."

"I will be," he said, winking.

She giggled a bit more before saying, "You don't have to do more than you've already done. You've been a boyfriend without benefits to both Ginny and me for a year, and treated us both better than most blokes treat one girlfriend. One thing I would like to say is that whatever, er, affection we decide to show," at this point both their faces were red, "we should do in private. Specifically, I don't want to make Ginny watch us, um, kissing when we decide to do that."

Harry took a deep breath. "Ok. So, will you be my date for every Hogsmeade weekend until you or I specifically state otherwise?"

"Of course. You didn't really need to ask since you already mentioned Hogsmeade."

"I just wanted it to be absolutely clear. I didn't want to assume anything."

"Well, thank you. Do you think we should talk to Ginny, now?"

"We can certainly try."

-

Five minutes later, holding hands, the new couple walked up to the door where they heard sobbing and knocked.

"Who is it?" called Ginny's shaky voice.

"It's Harry and me."

"I...you don't have to worry about me. I..."

"You're hurting and I know that I caused it," said Harry.

"It's ok," Ginny said through the closed door. "You had to hurt one of us. I understand. You like the older girl who can go to Hogsmeade with you, who doesn't have this horrid red hair and freckles, who's more...developed. I know!"

"Your red hair is one of your most beautiful features!" said Harry. "I did not pick Hermione because I think she's prettier than you! To me, you're both equally beautiful. I don't know why I feel more, er, attracted to her, but it's not because of anything you lack! I already said that it was a difficult choice. Please open the door."

"I...no."

"We both know you've been crying just like I'd be crying if Harry chose you."

"Fine," Ginny said, "You won't leave me alone until I open the door anyway."

"Exactly," said Harry.

Slowly, the door opened to reveal Ginny with eyes that matched her hair. Without a word, Hermione embraced her. At first Ginny resisted, but then started crying into her shoulder as Hermione said, "I never wanted to hurt you."

Harry stood there awkwardly for a few minutes, wondering if he should leave, until Ginny looked over at him. "Come here, Harry. You didn't do anything wrong. You belong in this hug." She and Hermione separated on one side to make this a three-way hug. "Best friends, right?"

"Best friends," repeated both Harry and Hermione together.

-

At the same time, Sirius was waiting in Diagon Alley with his wand in his hand. There were a total of fifty people stationed throughout the area. Ten of them were Order members, fifteen were aurors, and

twenty-five were members of the Life Force group that Madam Bones had put together specifically to fight Voldemort.

Suddenly, Sirius heard multiple apparition 'pops' and looked around. About one block away was the group of ten led by his cousin Bellatrix. He sprang into action, pointing his wand and sending a stunning spell at her from behind before she could curse a civilian. She heard the noise and raised a shield as she turned to face her assailant. The rest of her group was occupied fighting others who had come upon them just as suddenly as Sirius.

"So, dear cousin. You spent nearly as much time in Azkaban as me, but didn't even get to have fun beforehand. Crucio!"

Sirius jumped out of the way and sent a silent 'reducto' which she dodged as well.

"I don't call what you do fun!" He shot another hex at the same time as her. The spells met and ricocheted off each other, hitting buildings.

"But it is fun. Crucio!"

He jumped backwards, and now his back was against a shop. He chuckled, saying, "You'll never hit me with that curse," while she sent a silent 'reducto' at a sign directly above his head. The sign fell on him, knocking him to the ground.

She wasted no time hitting him with a Cruciatus curse that had him shaking as his head was hitting the wood that was still on top of him, worsening the wound that was already there.

She cackled so much that she didn't notice one of the Life Force members shoot ropes around her from behind. She then disappeared away, taking the ropes with her.

Sirius' rescuer shot a Life Mark into the air, declaring it a victory as another one put a portkey on the now unconscious Sirius Black, sending him to St. Mungo's.

## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 18 – Visiting Sirius**

“Lunch time!” came Molly Weasley’s voice, echoing upstairs.

Harry, Hermione, and Ginny were in Harry’s room, playing a game of exploding snap, which Ginny was winning. After their group hug, they decided to play a game, despite Ginny’s protest that the other two needed ‘alone time.’ They ended their game with a card exploding in Harry’s hand and went downstairs.

-

“Hello dears,” said Molly, pretending to be cheerful. She was just as worried as the rest of them.

The three kids walked up to the large table and sat on one side of it with Hermione in the middle instead of Harry. Mrs. Weasley noticed this change from Harry usually being in the middle, and also noticed Ginny’s eyes, which appeared to have recently shed some tears.

“So, how has your morning been?” she asked, hoping to find out what happened.

Harry took a deep breath. “Okay, apart from worrying about Sirius and the rest of the Order.”

“Yeah,” Hermione nodded nervously.

Ginny looked at the table. “Fine,” she muttered.

Molly wasn’t convinced of that, but decided to wait until after lunch to pursue the matter. “Well, the sandwiches are on the table. Tuck in.”

While they were still eating, the floo activated, and Mad-Eye Moody walked into the kitchen with a grim expression.

“Is it over?” said Harry, suddenly showing the panic he’d been hiding.

“Yes,” he said nodding, “and the Death Eaters didn’t get to cause nearly as much mayhem as they like, and many of the younger ones

were captured. Bellatrix, Snape, and Malfoy all escaped, but were seen leading the attacks.”

“So when will Sirius be back?”

“Actually, Potter, Sirius is at St. Mungo’s. According to the guy who sent him there, he was dueling his cousin and got cocky. While they were dueling he backed up directly underneath a sign that she broke above him and it collapsed. He was too busy insulting her to pay attention to his surrounding. He should have practiced constant vigilance! Even more so in a fight! He...”

“How badly is he hurt?” asked Molly as Harry paled.

Moody sighed, calming down from his sermon on constant vigilance. “After the sign collapsed on him, he was awake but she used the Cruciatus Curse on him. While he was thrashing under the spell, he repeatedly hit his head. He was unconscious when he was portkeyed away.”

“Then we’ve got to see him!” shouted Harry.

“Can we floo there?” asked Ginny.

“No,” said Hermione. “St. Mungo’s keeps their floo open only for emergencies. They don’t want visitors to delay injured people arriving. I read about it in ‘Modern Healing in the Wizarding World.’”

“Hermione’s right,” said Mrs. Weasley. “I guess we could take the Knight Bus, though.”

“Not without at least one more escort,” said Mad-Eye. Then he said a bit more softly, “I’ll get someone.”

-

An hour later they were walking into Sirius’ room at the hospital after taking a trip with an Order member Harry had never met before. She was a middle-aged woman named Joyce Lawly. She had dark brown hair that was just beginning to gray and a worried expression on her face. She looked almost as paranoid as Moody, but wasn’t as scarred

up, aside from a circular scar on her neck. Harry didn't ask about it, but did wonder what spell had caused it until he heard her speak halfway through the trip. Her voice was barely a whisper. When Hermione had asked her to speak up, she explained that she couldn't because a spell had all but destroyed her voice box.

Harry looked at his unconscious godfather as he lay in bed and instantly felt the guilt overwhelm him. "He's hurt because I told..."

"He wanted to fight. He knew the risks," said Ginny.

"If you hadn't told him about your dream a lot more people would be hurt or worse," added Hermione.

"But it wouldn't be Sirius."

"It might have been all of us," said Hermione.

"Maybe I could've helped! I..."

"He didn't want you to get hurt like this," said Molly. "As your guardian it's his decision, and I happen to agree with it."

"Why did he have to take time out to talk to Bellatrix?" asked Harry. "Couldn't he have paid more attention? That's what he always tells me when we practice! I can't believe he..."

"I can't believe it either," said Sirius, groggily.

Harry and the others smiled brightly. "You're awake!" he exclaimed.

"I'll go get a healer," said Molly excitedly.

"Sorry about that," said Sirius wearily. "I guess I let our old rivalry take over instead of using my head. You should never talk during your duels unless you want to end up hurt." Looking around he added, "I guess I'm at St. Mungo's." When they nodded, he asked, "How'd the rest of the battle go?"

Mad-Eye started to answer when the door opened and Mrs. Weasley entered with a female Healer.

"Hello everyone. I'm Healer Owen."

"How is Sirius?" asked Harry.

"Yeah," said Sirius softly, "How am I?"

She smiled at Padfoot. "Well, Mr. Black, your injuries from the sign collapsing have been healed already. The only concern we have now is that you have a concussion and will probably have a terrible headache once your pain potion wears off. That potion is why you're so drowsy. We'll need to keep you here for twenty-four hours of observation to make sure you're alright. We don't like to take chances with head injuries."

"So other than that?" Sirius said.

"Other than that you're okay."

"That's great," said Harry, showing relief in his eyes as he faced Healer Owen.

As she looked at him, her eyes flicked to his forehead. "You're Harry Potter," she said with a grin.

"That explains my scar," he said, stiffening up. "Sirius is my guardian."

"Really? Mr. Black will be just fine. I'll leave you all to chat with him for about fifteen minutes, and then we'll have to run some more simple tests."

Once the healer had gone, Sirius looked at Harry, who was standing with Hermione and Ginny. With a broad smile on his face, mainly to show he was fine, Padfoot said, "I see you've brought your two girlfriends with you."

Harry looked at the ground, Hermione looked at the ceiling shifting uncomfortably, and unshed tears filled Ginny's eyes as she turned and started walking toward her mum.

“What? Aren’t you gonna correct me, pup?” Sirius asked, wondering what was wrong.

Mrs. Weasley was looking between her daughter and Harry, and then at Hermione. She seemed to be catching on.

“I’m not his girlfriend,” said Ginny after fifteen seconds of silence, “Hermione is.”

“Is that true?” asked Molly, looking straight in Ginny’s eyes. She nodded her mother. “Ginny, would you like to go home?”

“No, I’m fine. We talked it over today. We’re still friends.”

“Best friends,” said Harry, approaching Ginny from behind and squeezing her shoulder reassuringly.

Sirius sighed and then smiled brightly, “Well then, I guess I should congratulate Harry and Hermione. Now I can accurately harass you both.”

“Thanks, I think,” said Harry softly as Hermione blushed.

“So Mad-Eye, you were about to tell us about the fight at Diagon Alley before Healer Owen came in.”

“So I was.”

Moody filled them all in on the battles that had taken place while Sirius was fighting his cousin. He had personally fought Snape and had him cornered until the former Potions teacher disappeared away. Half way through the discussion, Sirius fell asleep.

“That must be a strong potion,” said Harry with a smirk, “To make Sirius fall asleep while listening to a battle.”

-

True to the healer’s words, Sirius came home the next day, and naturally, they had a party. Time passed very quickly after that, and it was soon the day before they were to return to Hogwarts. Molly



Weasley had been a bit distant toward Harry since the revelation that he was dating Hermione, but no one commented on it. Right after lunch, Harry got Hermione and Ginny (who was getting more used to the idea of Harry dating Hermione, even though the new couple still hadn't actually gone out on a date or kissed, etc.) to do the elemental aptitude test in the basement of his home.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 19 –**

Harry quickly prepared the cups of dirt and water, along with the plate with a candle in the middle, the same as he had for his elemental test. “Ginny, why don’t you go first?” he suggested.

She smiled nervously at him. “Thanks, but Hermione is older and should probably...”

“Nonsense,” interrupted Hermione, “Age has nothing to do with this test. You should go first.”

Ginny smirked at the brunette. “You’re nervous, too, aren’t you?”

Hermione’s face flushed but she didn’t say anything.

“Alright. I’ll go first this time.”

Harry and Hermione backed away to the other side of the room and sat down as Ginny began relaxing herself in preparation. Harry turned off the lights, leaving the room completely dark. When Ginny was ready, she muttered the Latin incantation.

The candle lit, and the trio opened their eyes, directing them toward the soil. As they stared at it, Ginny muttered something else, and the dirt moved out of the cup onto the plate, forming a one-inch tall barrier around the edge of the plate. Once that was complete, she turned her attention to the glass of water. After muttering another Latin incantation, it seemed to jump out of the glass and onto the middle of the plate, surrounding the bottom of the tall candle. The dirt stopped the water from spilling off the plate. Ginny finally looked at the flame and said the last phrase, and it blew out.

The room was pitch black for exactly five seconds until the candle relit. As they watched, the flame grew into the size of a Quaffle, and then went out, leaving them once again in complete darkness.

“Fire,” the redhead said with a smile.

“It matches your hair,” said Harry.

“And my temper,” she said, still grinning. “I know you both were thinking it.”

Both Hermione and Harry looked down with guilty expressions on their faces.

“Never,” said Hermione, not even trying to appear sincere. The other two chuckled. “I guess it’s my turn then?”

They quickly prepared for Hermione’s test, and she performed it. The end result was that the dirt moved out of its cup onto the plate, forming a one-inch tall barrier around the edge of the plate. Once they heard something beginning to happen, Harry used his wand to turn the lights back on. The dirt then began changing shape, moving into a pile at the center of the plate, where the water still was. As it turned into mud, it molded itself into the size and shape of Hermione’s head, and then formed into a mountain. The others watched in awe as the mass of the dirt seemed to grow. It turned into a miniature mountain, until a large crack formed in the center. The rest of the dirt seemed to sink into the crack, and the rest of it separated, reforming the one-inch barrier around the plate. “Earth!” declared Hermione proudly, “I’ll be able to cause earthquakes.”

“Right underneath Death Eaters,” continued Harry happily, “at least the ones Ginny isn’t burning to death.”

“Or that you haven’t turned to ashes and blown away,” said Ginny as she giggled.

Harry chuckled a bit. “I’ve been wondering if I’ll be able to fly without a broom when I master air.”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “Perhaps, but now’s not the time to try that.”

“We just need someone who can control water now,” said Ginny.

“It’s rare enough for someone to control any element,” said Hermione. “We should be pleased that we can...”

“I was just kidding, Hermione,” said Ginny.

"If I use air properly, I should be able to make water do whatever I want, even cause a tornado eventually."

Hermione nodded in agreement as a smile formed on her lips. "I do believe you're right, Harry. When you put it that way, the air control can double as water control."

"Exactly," said Harry, as a small wind began blowing on the muddy water, causing waves to form.

"Wow!" said Ginny.

"You'd better stop before an accident happens," said Hermione.

Harry shrugged his shoulders as the wind stopped. "I suppose we should check the book to find out what exercises Hermione needs to do for her element. Ginny, I know exactly what you need to do."

After both girls had learned the exercises they needed to perform, they separated to pack for Hogwarts.

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The next day, after heartfelt goodbyes from Sirius, Molly, and Arthur; Harry, Hermione, Ginny, and Ron boarded the Hogwarts Express together. Percy, who was still a prefect, had boarded ahead of time to be early for his meeting. Draco had elected to not return to Hogwarts this year. He still felt that he would be in danger from the Junior Death Eaters for turning his back on his father.

From their closed compartment, Harry wasn't surprised to see Theodore Nott walking around the train, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. He idly wondered how much it would cost to get those two idiots to turn on Nott and beat him up in the Slytherin common room. He was a bit surprised that Nott was already wearing his school robes, but didn't think much about it.

"I wonder what he's so happy about," said Ron, commenting on Nott's expression.

"I don't know," answered Harry, "Maybe his father got one less second under Voldemort's cruciatus curse than Lucius. I think that's how they determine who Tom's favorite is."

"I honestly wonder why anyone would follow someone who tortures them," said Hermione.

"Unfortunately, they do," said Harry seriously.

At that moment, Nott decided to open their door. "Look who it is, the Little-Boy-Who-Lived." Crabbe and Goyle laughed at that like it was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. Ron, Hermione, and Ginny all grabbed their wands, but Harry stayed in a relaxed position.

Harry looked in his eyes as the bottom of Nott's robe caught fire. "Do you really want us to start humiliating you guys in the halls again this year," he said with a sigh. "That really gets boring."

"Maybe you won't be able to beat me this year," he said arrogantly. "Did you ever think of that?"

"Truthfully, no. I don't know what your Death Nibbler daddy tried to teach you, but honestly I doubt a squib like you can even..."

"I AM NOT A SQUIB!!!" he shouted, pulling out his wand until something was squirming around underneath his robes near his chest.

Harry heard a strange voice that said, "*Hot! Must leave flames!*" as Theodore looked down to see his robes were now burning from the waist down.

"Ahh!" he said, glaring at the Gryffindors. "Which one of you did it?"

"I don't know," said Harry, finally reaching for his wand, "but I'll do you a favor." He pointed his wand at the burning Slytherin and said, "*Aguamenti.*" Water began squirting out of his wand at the flames. Soon Hermione, Ginny, and Ron laughingly joined in as Nott became completely drenched.

With his face red, Nott shouted, "This isn't over, Potter!" as he turned around and retreated, with Crabbe and Goyle, who were half-soaked themselves, following closely behind.

As soon as their door was closed again, Harry said, "Do you think I should have dried them off?" as he used the air like a blow drier on the floor where the Slytherins had occupied. The others laughed as someone knocked on the door. Harry looked up and said, "Come on in, Neville."

He had a smile on his face as he asked, "What did you do to Nott?"

Chuckling, they explained that his robes had caught fire, and they were simply putting the fire out. Neville looked at each of them. "Which one of you set him on fire?" After a few seconds of silence, he said, "Come on guys. You can trust me."

Finally Harry spoke. "I suppose so. I did."

"How. You weren't touching your wand."

"I can't say, Neville. It's a secret."

He then looked at Harry as his eyes bugged out. "You're an elemental!" he exclaimed while pointing at Harry.

"Quiet!" said Hermione.

"Sorry," he whispered. "So, how do you become one?"

Hermione answered. "You perform a spell that shows if you have any elemental control. If you do, then you practice controlling your element."

"Have any of you taken the test?"

"All but me," answered Ron.

"Why haven't you?"

"I couldn't memorize the incantation soon enough," said Ron unhappily.

“You’ll learn it soon enough, Ron,” said Harry, “and then you can take the test.”

“Can I take it, too?” asked Neville.

Harry’s eyes widened a bit. He didn’t really think Neville would be able to control an element. However, he smiled and said, “Sure, why not? We’ll get you the incantation to memorize tonight after the feast.”

They then chatted for the rest of the trip until it was time to put on their robes. When Neville mentioned Harry’s lack of glasses, he simply said he was wearing contact lenses. After the train stopped, they rode the carriages to Hogwarts and sat down at the Gryffindor table for the sorting and feast. Harry noticed a lot fewer Slytherins joined the school this year than usual.

After the feast, Dumbledore gave his start of term notices. After mentioning what Mr. Filch wasn’t allowing in the school, he said, “I’ve no doubt that some of you have read about our new school policies in the Daily Prophet, but for the benefit of those who haven’t, I’ll explain it. You see, certain happenings of last year brought it to my attention that the school needs more discipline. After meeting with the Board of Governors, this is what we came up with.

“Basically whenever a student is injured, they, along with every witness, will be given veritaserum in front of myself and all the heads of house and asked how they were hurt. If it is found that another student injured them, that student will be brought in and questioned under veritaserum as well. If it was intentional or while harassing the victim, the guilty party will be sent home for the rest of the year and have to retake it if they return, even if the term was almost over. If the injuries are life-threatening, the ministry will be apprised as well, and may choose to prosecute the bully to whatever extent the law allows given the circumstances, especially if they’re of age. If they ever do it again, they will be expelled.

“Defense of self or others will never result in punishment again. As long as the culprit either hexed or hit someone first. We’ll take pensieve memories of the incident as well.” Dumbledore then looked toward Harry with a twinkle in his eyes. “So if you’re defending someone, don’t hurt the bully after they’re down. You may wish to

stick with stunning and body-binds that don't actually harm people if possible. However, Hogwarts will allow whatever force is necessary to keep innocent students safe."

There was cheering from three of the four tables when the headmaster finished his speech. The Slytherin bullies looked mad while the other Slytherins looked like they wanted to cheer, but were scared of the bullies."

Harry grinned as he said, "Hopefully, the new policy will make this year a lot easier, but I still want Potter's Army to patrol the halls."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 20 – A Halloween to Remember**

Dumbledore then introduced the new Care of Magical Creatures teacher - Professor Grubbly-Plank, and then dismissed the students to their dorm. All the other teachers from last year were still there. Finally, wishing them all a goodnight, the headmaster dismissed the students.

In their first Care of Magical Creatures class, Professor Grubbly-Plank introduced them to a very friendly leprechaun and told them about their special disappearing gold. Theodore Nott wasn't paying attention and Harry saw him, Crabbe, and Goyle pocket a few handfuls of the leprechaun's gold during the lesson. The next day he heard a rumor that those three had accused other Slytherins of robbing them in the middle of the night and gotten into fights, earning detentions.

-

On Thursday morning the Daily Prophet carried a story about a family that had been tortured into insanity by Death Eaters. Neville seemed especially shaken up by that article. That was the day they had their first Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson of the term. Professor Lupin, who had started during the previous year, had his third-years face a dark creature that was causing a wardrobe in the staff room to wobble around.

"Now, can anyone guess what is inside that wardrobe?"

Both Hermione's and Harry's hands shot up in the air.

"Mr. Potter?"

"Er, is it a Boggart?" he asked, remembering what he'd read about a few months before. He, along with Hermione and Ginny, were reading ahead in their Defense books, hoping to take the D.A.D.A. O.W.L.s early. He and Hermione hoped to take them at the end of the year and were about half-way through the fourth-year books.

Lupin smiled at Harry. "Yes indeed it is. Five points to Gryffindor. Does anyone know what a Boggart does?" Looking around to only see the same two hands in the air, Moony called on, "Miss Granger?"

"The Boggart becomes whatever the person facing it fears the most."

"Another five points. Now the way to defeat a Boggart is very simple. You just have to force it to take on a shape that amuses you." He went on to explain the charm and called on Neville to try first.

The Boggart was released, and out came a Death Eater in full apparel. Half of the class started running away, while those that were in Potter's Army pulled out their wands. Although Neville was visibly shaking at the person pointing a wand at him, he managed to keep his head. Neville shouted, "Riddikulus," and suddenly the evil warrior was clad in his grandmother's wardrobe, including the vulture-hat. After a moment, the class realized that the face of the Death Eater was none other than Severus Snape's.

The class went well after that, although Harry was a bit confused as to why Remus hadn't allowed him to face the Boggart. After speaking to Hermione about it, they concluded what his Boggart probably would have been. All the panic that a normal Death Eater caused was nothing compared to what Voldemort himself would have done.

-

The next few weeks passed by uneventfully. In the first week, Potter's Army had to break up a few skirmishes, but not many. For some unexplained reason Theodore Nott's pants would catch on fire every few days at the most inopportune times, such as in class. Harry was enjoying practicing with his fire element. Finally both Ron and Neville said they were ready to find out if they could control any elements.

Harry prepared the unused classroom that Dumbledore allowed him to use, and Ron went first. As he said the incantation, nothing happened.

"What?" Ron exclaimed as his face turned red. "I must have said it wrong or Harry must not have said it right! If Ginny can control one, so can I!"

“Ron,” said Harry, “Ginny’s ability has nothing to do with you. There are very few elemental magicians out there. I know I did my part right. I’ve done it more than once. You can try again, but it sounded like you did it right to me.”

“Fine.” Ron then sat down and tried again. Nothing happened. “I guess that’s something else I can’t do,” he said with his head hung down as he left the classroom.

Neville, who’d been there but remained silent, walked up to Harry. “If Ron can’t even do it, I probably won’t be able to either. Maybe I should just...”

“You memorized the spell, right?” interrupted Harry.

“Well, yeah.”

“Then what harm will there be in trying?”

Putting his head down and dragging his feet, Neville made his way silently to where Ron had been sitting minutes ago.

As Neville began, the candle lit, surprising them both. He continued watching the other elements move, showing that he would be able to control one of them. When it came to the point where his power was revealed, the dirt moved, showing that he could control, “Earth!”

“Congratulations, Neville,” said Harry sincerely before instructing him in the proper exercises for him to learn control of his element.

-

When Harry and Neville arrived in the common room, it was to find Ron sulking as Hermione and Ginny were talking to him. Harry noticed Ron look at Neville’s delighted face and quickly turn away with a look of disgust. When they were close enough, Neville whispered, “I’m an Earth elemental!” excitedly. Ron got up and walked away while the girls were congratulating the excited teenager.

Ron didn’t speak to them for a few days, but eventually stopped acting angry after being hexed by his sister.

-

Time kept on moving quickly, and by October there had been no serious problems in the halls, so Harry had his 'army' reduce their patrols, but not eliminate them. He had a feeling that they would be necessary. Before they knew it, Halloween had arrived, and with it Harry's first trip to Hogsmeade. It also happened to be his and Hermione's first date. Ron was going to hang out with Seamus and Dean.

At breakfast, Harry asked Ginny, "Is there anything at all we can get you in the village?"

"No," she said glumly.

"How about some candy?" suggested Hermione.

"Okay," said the redhead without much enthusiasm.

"Are you sure you're alright with this? With me and Hermione dating?"

She looked up at them and put on her happiest face. "I'm fine with it. Maybe I'd be happier if I were the one going instead of Hermione, but I'll be alright. Have a good time. I expect at least ten chocolate frogs, six boxes of...oh, never mind. I'll write you a list." She then pulled out a quill, ink, and parchment. "And don't forget to go to Zonko's too!" She wrote down items from that store as well.

At the same time, a few tables over, Theodore Nott was grinning to himself about his plans.

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A few hours later, Harry and Hermione were drinking their first butterbeers at the Three Broomsticks. They had shopped at several stores, including Zonko's, Honeydukes, and of course the bookstore. Harry had taken his special trunk with him, and so all the bags had been placed inside it and then the trunk was shrunk down and put in Harry's pocket. Hermione was carrying a bouquet of red roses Harry had bought her.

"It's amazing how many people want to look at the Shrieking Shack," said Harry with a smile.

"If they only knew the truth," agreed his date.

"Now that we've got our shopping done, what do you want to do?"

"Maybe hang around with my boyfriend. Do you realize this is the longest that we've been alone?"

He grinned at her. "I guess so. Do you want to go exploring a bit? Sirius told me that there's a cave somewhere around here."

As they walked out of the village proper, carrying a bag with four extra bottles of butterbeer, they didn't notice Nott ditch Crabbe and Goyle to head back to the school.

-

After about an hour, the young couple found the cave they were looking for and cautiously walked inside to find it empty. Hermione performed a few charms to make the ground comfortable and the cave warm. They sat down against the wall, with her leaning her head on Harry's shoulder.

"We should have brought a blanket to sit on," said Harry.

"This is fine, Harry. We can scourgify our clothes later. I'm really comfortable here."

Harry suddenly found himself feeling nervous, wondering what he should do. He managed to put his right arm around Hermione. She gently took that hand in hers as it draped over her right shoulder.

"This is, er, nice. Um, is that a new perfume you're weaing?" he asked shyly as he noticed the aroma.

Blushing, she replied, "Yes, I, er, wear it for special occasions."

"It smells really pretty. Um, did I mention how nice you look today? It's good to see you without those Hogwarts robes. I mean, er, you look good in the Hogwarts robes too. It's just..."

She giggled to herself at her boyfriend's anxiety. "Thank you, Harry. You look very nice, too."

He blushed and turned his head away from her, trying to hide how red his face was. "Thanks," he managed to say. He wondered to himself how he'd managed to spend a year hanging out with her and Ginny without getting tongue-tied.

"If you really think I look nice, why are you looking away from me?" asked Hermione, knowing that he was blushing.

"Y-you do look...pretty," he managed as he turned his red face toward hers. She was biting her lower lip as she looked at his lips. He gulped audibly as the thought, 'she wants me to kiss her,' crossed his mind. At the same time, he slightly smiled. He gazed at her lips and decided that Hermione had cast a much-too-powerful heating charm as he felt himself begin to sweat.

Gulping once more, he leaned his head over toward hers as he puckered up his lips. His heart was beating so fast he was afraid it would break out of his chest. He noticed that she'd shut her eyes and licked her lips. He remembered hearing about people bumping their noses, so he put his left hand on her cheek and leaned in, touching his lips to hers.

It only lasted a few seconds, but he'd never forget the sensations that went through his body during those few seconds. He decided at that moment that he very much liked kissing. As they parted, he couldn't help but smile from ear to ear, even though he knew his face was red. He noticed she was doing the same thing.

They sipped on butterbeer for awhile and talked about various things. Finally, Harry cleared his throat. "Do you, er, think we should be heading back to school?"

“Um, yeah.” He got up and then helped her. They continued holding hands as they left the cave. She was holding the flowers in her free hand.

“That was...nice,” said Harry timidly.

“Yes, it was. We should do that more often.” She then kissed him on the cheek.

-

When they got back into town (after kissing a few more times), they found that no kids were there.

“It must be later than I thought,” said Harry.

“I hope we’re not in trouble.”

They hurried to find one carriage apparently waiting for them. “I do hope we’re not banned from Hogsmeade now!” At this point Hermione was really worried.

They didn’t see anyone when they entered the castle. “I wonder what’s going on.”

The Great Hall was closed up. “We can’t have missed the feast. It was still light outside. I wish I’d worn a watch!”

“Me too. I guess we should go to Gryffindor Tower.”

“This is giving me the creeps,” said Hermione with a worried expression. “I’ve never seen the school this empty.”

“Me neither.” They both pulled out their wands, ready for anything.

“There you are!” came a voice from around the corner. Both Harry and Hermione jumped in fright as they pointed their wands in the direction of the voice.

“Stop! It’s me. Professor McGonagall.”

They both breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, it's you, Professor," said Harry.

"We haven't seen anybody since we entered the castle, and were afraid that something..."

"Something has happened. Mr. Filch and his cat were attacked. The cat, Mrs. Norris, is dead. Mr. Filch is petrified, and we can't revive him. The only way we know of requires mandrakes. Unfortunately, the ones that your class grew last year were sold. Madam Pomfrey is attempting to procure some more. In any case, all the students have been sent to their dormitories, and will have their own private Halloween Feasts there."

"That's where we were headed," said Harry with a neutral expression. He wasn't sure how he was supposed to feel about this attack. He wished that Filch and his cat would leave, not get attacked.

"I'm headed there as well. The heads of house are joining the students. You two were the last Gryffindors that I haven't accounted for. An announcement was made in Hogsmeade for everyone to return. Why didn't you come back then?"

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and slightly blushed. Harry spoke. "We, er, weren't exactly in the village. We, um, went exploring and...er..."

"I get the picture, Mr. Potter," she said, looking between their blushing faces and the roses. "I'm afraid that this won't look good for you. You're the only students without an alibi that can be verified by anyone besides yourselves." She took a deep breath. "However, attacking Mr. Filch is not what I suspect you of."

-

A few minutes, later, the door to the Gryffindor common room opened, revealing McGonagall, Granger, and Potter. Harry gasped as he saw that the room had been rearranged to have a few long tables in it instead of the couches. Everyone was already eating. They saw two empty chairs between Ginny and Ron, who'd looked relieved when



they entered. Hermione quickly went up to her dorm to put her flowers there and returned to the table.

She sat in the empty space between Ginny and Harry (Ron was on Harry's other side). Ginny whispered, "Where were you?"

"Outside of Hogsmeade," said Hermione blushing slightly.

"You were kissing," said Ginny with a smirk. She'd made up her mind not to make Harry and Hermione feel guilty about dating, but she would tease them.

"Er...um...yes. What happened? Professor McGonagall said Mrs. Norris was killed and Mr. Filch is petrified."

"Yeah. They were found near Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. The floor was flooded, probably from one of her tantrums. Anyway, they were both lying on the floor, and there was this message written in blood on the wall. 'The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir Beware.'"

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

The diary isn't required to open the chamber. I think that Voldemort would have used the chamber after he returned if the basilisk hadn't been killed.

Hagrid's name wasn't cleared because the 'Chamber business' did not occur, therefore he couldn't teach. Besides, truthfully Hagrid's love of dangerous creatures made him a less-than-perfect professor.

Professor Lupin hasn't taught a full year yet, so the curse on the DADA teaching position hasn't gotten him...yet.

## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 21 – The Next Attack**

The next month went by quickly, with everyone speculating about the Chamber of Secrets. Most of the students accepted the explanation that Harry and Hermione were kissing in a cave at the time of the attack. For one thing, they didn't think a muggleborn would lie for the heir of Slytherin, whose goal is to kill all muggleborns. For another thing, Harry was a Gryffindor, not a Slytherin. It had been announced that Madam Pomfrey would be able to get mature mandrakes just after Christmas, so Mr. Filch would be revived before the next term.

Without Filch there to terrorize the students, the atmosphere was extremely pleasant, despite Nott strutting around happily. Nott's good mood did not go unnoticed by Harry or most of the Potter's Army. The idiot, just like his predecessor Malfoy (who was still living with his mother in one of Harry's houses), always acted in a way that brought suspicion upon himself. Harry had his people keep an eye on Nott after Filch was petrified, but they couldn't find him doing anything unusual.

Dumbledore hired a young witch named Mindy Weaver to take Filch's place as caretaker. She'd been a Hufflepuff who'd done well in charms, but not much else. She had finished Hogwarts the year before Harry started. She had short brown hair and blue eyes. She was short and a bit plump, but was pleasant to be around.

Using cleaning charms, she was able to clean the entire castle in one day, as opposed to the cranky squib who took a week to do the same job. Fortunately, Dumbledore didn't punish her for being efficient by giving her more work. She would clean the entire castle every Sunday and relax for the rest of the week. She had a few students in her office for tea almost every day. Everybody liked her a whole lot more than Filch, and Harry had heard rumors that the staff was putting pressure on Albus to sack Argus as soon as he was unpetrified.

Hermione had immediately looked up the Chamber of Secrets in her copy of *'Hogwarts, a History.'* Every day she was grateful for the magically expanded trunks that Harry had bought both her and Ginny the previous year. Even her entire collection of books easily fit into it.

She'd noticed that every copy of that book had been checked out of the library.

-

Harry, Hermione, and Ginny were revising in the library when a blonde Ravenclaw girl wearing a necklace of butterbeer caps walked up. "Ginny, Now that I've gotten away from the upside-down ultries, I think it would be a good time to work on our potions essay."

The redhead looked up, startled. "What? Oh, Luna. I guess so." She looked at her friends. "Guys, this is Luna Lovegood. Luna, this Hermione Granger and Harry Potter."

"You're the leader of Potter's Army."

He blushed at the title. "Er, yes."

"I should thank you. Some of your soldiers saved my life last year."

"I'm glad we could help."

"Have you found the double-headed dingbat that attacked Mr. Filch yet?"

"The what?" asked Hermione.

"The double-headed dingbat," Luna answered patiently while Ginny buried her face in her hands. "They are pink bats that have red ears that are shaped like stars, and have two heads. When both mouths sing 'London Bridge is Falling Down' into both of your ears at the same time, you get petrified. My father wrote an article about them in the Quibbler last summer. Don't you subscribe?"

Harry had the distinct impression that this girl was out of her mind. He noticed that Hermione was shaking her head in disbelief, yet remaining silent. "Er, no."

"Oh, you really should subscribe. The Quibbler contains information on many rare species. I can get you an order form."

“Why don’t we get another table where we can work on our project?” interrupted Ginny.

“Oh. Harry and Hermione want to be alone. That happens when a triple-beaked hegling is around. It was nice to meet you. See you later.”

“Thank goodness,” said Hermione once the second-years were out of earshot. “I can’t believe anyone actually believes the Quibbler. I thought it was just a joke that even the writers didn’t take seriously. But if the daughter of one of the writers is taking that rubbish seriously...”

“I think Luna seemed nice, if a little strange. Anyway, she’s a friend of Ginny’s.”

“It looked more like a partner for a school project,” corrected Hermione. “Probably an assigned partner.”

Before Harry could respond, he heard a voice coming out of the walls. *“Must kill. Let me rip you and eat you.”*

“Who said that?”

“Said what, Harry?” asked Hermione, looking around to see if someone might have whispered to her boyfriend.

“It wants to kill,” he whispered as he got up and left the library.

-

Hermione quickly grabbed their stuff and followed him. She saw him standing down the hall. He appeared to be listening intently to something she couldn’t hear. He noticed her and said, “This way!”

As she followed him, even on a staircase, she realized that they were heading in the direction of Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

“Look at this!” Harry shouted toward her. She ran to find a boy lying on the floor petrified with a camera in front of his face.

She gasped in horror as she realized, "It's Colin Creevey!"

"I know," said Harry. He then appeared to be concentrating. "Whatever did this is still around! Take care of Colin!" He ran around a corner and disappeared from Hermione's sight.

Seconds later she heard Peeves' voice echoing in the hall. "What's Potty in such a hurry for? Potty wants..."

"I don't have time for this, Peeves!" Harry shouted. "I..." Hermione heard a loud thump, and then a door close. She stood there for about sixty seconds, too terrified to look around the corner as her eyes began to fill with unshed tears.

She was brought out of her stupor by a voice calling behind her. "Hey, Hermione, we saw you leave the library in a hurry! Is that Colin? Where's Harry?"

Hermione turned to see Ginny, who'd asked the questions, standing with Luna. Shakily, the brunette answered. "Yes, it is Colin. Harry ran around the corner. He was arguing with Peeves, and then I think he fell."

Ginny looked both upset and horrified. "You THINK he fell! Haven't you even checked? I thought you were looking after him!"

Ignoring Ginny's words, Hermione turned and walked around the corner to find that she was right. Harry was lying completely still on his back, and Peeves was floating as though frozen stiff. Tears started falling down her face.

"I should have stopped him," Hermione muttered as Ginny turned around the corner and screamed. "He thought he heard whatever attacked Colin and was after it." She sniffled as she tried to recall every detail. "I, I heard a door close." She looked around and saw that the only door nearby was the door to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

"Miss Granger! Miss Weasley! Miss Lovegood! What's happened?" Professor McGonagall was approaching them from the other direction.

Ginny just stood there pale and in shock, and Hermione didn't want to hear Luna's reply, so she decided to answer. Swallowing hard, she slowly said, "We were in the library, and Harry heard something talking about killing and ran off to follow it. I didn't hear the voice, but I followed him. I guess Ginny and Luna followed us. Anyway, Harry and I came across Colin lying petrified on the floor. He's around that corner." She pointed the direction she'd come from.

"Not him too?" asked Minerva, looking horrified.

"Yes." She took a deep breath as the tears continued falling down her eyes. "Harry heard the voice again and ran around the corner. I heard him arguing with Peeves until I heard him fall. I then heard a door close. I, I think it was this one."

"Then get away from it. I shall investigate." Minerva pulled out her wand and slowly opened the door that Hermione had walked away from. After she'd looked in the room, she went back to the girls looking very pale. "It would appear that Moaning Myrtle is petrified as well."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 22 – Investigating What Happened**

After McGonagall had summoned Madam Pomfrey to deal with the latest victims, she looked at the three 'almost witnesses.' "Miss Granger, Weasley, and Lovegood," she said, "I'm afraid that according to the new school rules, you'll all have to be questioned under veritaserum."

"What?!" said Ginny, looking offended.

"I understand," said Hermione, who was still silently crying, "Two students have been injured. I'll do anything to help Harry and find out what attacked him."

"You may have seen or heard something and not have realized it," said the professor, "but that potion has a way of getting every detail out of someone, even if they think it's insignificant."

"Alright," said Ginny.

"That's fine, Professor McGonagall," said Luna, "But none of us saw the double-headed dingbat."

"What?" asked McGonagall until she saw Ginny shake her head with a slight smile. "Anyway, I'll escort you to the headmaster's office and then I'll collect the other heads of house to witness the questioning."

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Twenty minutes later, they were all in the headmaster's office, and Hermione had just been given a few drops of veritaserum. She had an unusually peaceful expression on her face.

"Please state your name," said Professor Dumbledore while Professor Flitwick took notes.

"Hermione Jean Granger."

"Earlier today, you were in the library with Harry Potter when he suddenly decided to leave. Why did he do that?"

“He said that he heard a voice that wanted to kill.”

“Did you hear anything, Miss Granger?”

“No.”

Albus continued to question Hermione on every detail of what had happened. Eventually they got to the point where, “Harry said, ‘Whatever did this is still around! Take care of Colin!’ He ran around a corner and disappeared from my sight. A moment later, he was arguing with Peeves.”

“Did you hear anything beside Harry and Peeves?”

Her eyebrows came closer together as she concentrated. “I heard some sort of, I don’t know what. It was sort of like wind blowing. I don’t know what it was.”

Professor Dumbledore appeared deep in thought for a moment. “Miss Granger, will you be kind enough to provide your memory of the incident for us to view in my Pensieve?”

“Of course, Professor.”

A few minutes later, Ginny, Luna, Hermione, Dumbledore, and the four heads of houses were inside the memory of that hallway, listening as closely as Hermione’s recollection would allow them. The aged headmaster yet again appeared deep in thought as he listened intently. Hermione, who was now nearly completely over the affects of veritaserum, was listening as well, trying to ignore the sounds of Harry and Peeves.

“I believe that it sounds like a snake of some sort,” said Dumbledore pensively. “Voldemort is a Parselmouth. I wonder if Harry is as well. It would make him more of an equal. It would explain how he could hear the voice when no one else could.”

“But Poppy didn’t find any bite marks on any of the victims, nor any trace of venom inside their blood,” said Minerva.



“There are magical creatures that can harm others without touching them,” said Hermione as she closed her eyes in thought. “I remember reading about something like that in a book on magical creatures. Excuse me. I need to go back to the library.”

Before anyone could say anything, the brunette had practically run out the door. With a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye, the headmaster calmly said, “Why yes, Miss Granger. You are dismissed. Good day.”

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Half an hour later, Hermione was sitting alone at a table in the library, reading a book about rare magical creatures, when she found the page on basilisks. She was about to tear the page out of the book when Professor Dumbledore, accompanied by McGonagall, Luna, and Ginny, approached her.

“Miss Granger, are you about to ruin a library book?” asked McGonagall sternly.

Hermione’s face went scarlet as she buried her face in her hands. “Er, um, I...”

“First you run out of the headmaster’s office without being dismissed, and now this? I’m afraid I’ll have to take ten points from Gryffindor for your behavior.”

Dumbledore spoke next. “In the future, Miss Granger, I’m sure Madam Pince would appreciate it if you’d use the duplication spell.” He then pointed his wand at the page she’d been about to tear and (for teaching purposes) said the incantation. An exact copy of that page appeared on the table next to the book.

“Er, thanks, and I’m sorry for running off like that.”

“Perfectly understandable,” said the wizened old man. “Am I to assume that this page contains the key to the mystery we’ve been investigating.” She nodded as he picked up the page he’d created. “A basilisk?” he mumbled to himself in surprise. “Why didn’t I think of it all those years ago?” His face paled as he thought about the

implications. "We've been lucky that only a cat died. There's no way to defend against a foul creature such as this. We may have to close the school."

"And send the children home," agreed the deputy headmistress.

"Can't we just seal off the entrance?" asked Hermione.

"Entrance?" asked Minerva.

"Isn't it obvious? It went into that toilet, but was gone when you looked in there."

"It would make sense," said Albus. "That is where Myrtle died fifty-one years ago."

"But it could be going through the pipes to different parts of the castle," said Ginny, "even if we seal that particular door."

"I seriously doubt we could seal the door so that Voldemort couldn't get in."

"Voldemort's the heir of Slytherin, then?" asked Hermione.

"Yes, but he hasn't set foot in the castle for over thirty-five years. That's what's strange about it."

"Couldn't he simply possess somebody like he did Quirrel?" asked Ginny.

"Certainly," said Dumbledore, "Especially if they were a willing vessel."

"Like Theodore Nott," said Ginny venomously.

"Now, now, Miss Weasley. Everyone in this school is innocent until proven guilty. Although we will keep a closer eye on him. He certainly acts like a Death Eater." Dumbledore sighed. "I remember the good-old-days when Death Eater students at least pretended they weren't. Tom Riddle himself presented the image of an upright member of society. But alas, those were much more clever people. It seems that

this new generation would probably like to have the Dark Mark tattooed on their foreheads the way they openly celebrate Voldemort's victories, and openly express disappointment over his defeats."

"In other words," said Ginny, "They're idiots who make sure they're always at the top of everybody's suspect lists."

"Exactly, Miss Weasley."

"While I agree with those observations," said McGonagall, "Perhaps we could return to the discussion of what we should do about the basilisk."

"Perhaps we should investigate the entrance to the chamber and determine our options."

"Good idea," said Hermione, "Let's go." Both professors looked at her like she'd grown a second head.

"While we are suitably impressed with your analytical abilities, and grateful for your input, it is our responsibility to keep all students, yourself included, safe. I don't believe your parents would be very happy with me if they knew I'd willingly taken you to the entrance of a basilisk's lair. In fact, I believe that it would be a good idea to confine all students to their common rooms until we decide what to do. Minerva, will you see to that while I look around Myrtle's loo to find the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets."

Once the teachers had left and the kids were leaving the library, Luna commented, "I guess that a basilisk makes more sense in this situation than a double-headed dingbat. They don't kill cats."

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 23 – Dumbledore's Announcement**

As Professor Dumbledore left Moaning Myrtle's loo, he was not a happy man. After looking around for only a few minutes, he had found the carving of a snake's head on a tap that didn't work, and was almost positive that it was the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. After trying every blasting hex he could think of to destroy the entrance with no results, he came to the conclusion that only a Parselmouth could get the entrance to open properly, and no one could harm the sink in any way. It had apparently been warded against tampering by Salazar Slytherin over a thousand years ago and could not be damaged.

He sealed the door he'd just walked out of so that no one would be able to get through the door, but still didn't feel that the school was safe. If they were correct and a basilisk was loose, it could get out of the room through the plumbing, which meant that no place at Hogwarts was safe, and that it had been pure luck that no one but a cat had died so far. He could not guarantee anyone's safety, not even his own.

No teacher could protect a student from a basilisk – no one could. If that snake went into an occupied classroom, one of the common rooms, or worse yet – the Great Hall during a meal, the results would be catastrophic. Until the chamber of Secrets could be opened and the basilisk destroyed, he had no choice. He sent a message to all the staff for a meeting immediately, even if it was late.

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At breakfast the next morning, all of the staff, as well as Harry's friends, noticed the way that Theodore Nott happily strutted into the Great Hall.

"I can't believe that he's so stupid that he'll show how happy he is!" said Hermione.

"Why doesn't he wear a sign on his back that says I'm opening the Chamber of Secrets?" asked Ginny.

Before anyone could respond, Dumbledore walked up to the podium with a long face. There was no twinkle in his eyes. He began his speech. "As you all are no doubt aware, the school is no longer safe and we are fortunate that so far no students have been killed. I'm afraid that currently I cannot guarantee your safety anymore." He took a deep breath. "It is with great regret that I must inform you that for the first time since Hogwarts was founded, the term is ending early."

There were gasps all around the hall until Albus continued his announcement. "There will be no classes today. Instead, you will all return to your dorms with your heads of house and begin packing your belongings. The Hogwarts Express will be arriving in Hogsmeade at precisely one o'clock to take you home. Owls have been sent to all of your parents. When the mandrakes arrive, the proper potion will be distributed to all of the petrified victims. Hopefully they will be able to provide us with more information.

"You will receive an owl informing you when the school is safe once more and ready to reopen. I will not rest until that is the case. It is my hope that the Chamber of Secrets will be discovered and the beast within destroyed before term is scheduled to begin in January and this will become just a long Christmas break. For now, tuck in."

There was muttering all through the Great Hall about things such as fear that Hogwarts was no longer safe, faith (or lack thereof – depending on the person) in Dumbledore's ability to find and destroy the monster, Harry Potter's petrification, and of course excitement to leave school early.

During all of this, Hermione noticed something. "Hey guys, look at the Slytherin table."

The four heads of house with very grim faces were talking to Nott. He got up and strutted with them in the direction of the Headmaster's office.

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While most of the students were starting their breakfasts, Theodore Nott was sitting in the headmaster's office with five very unhappy people staring down at him.

Dumbledore couldn't believe how one so young could be so evil as he looked down at the thirteen-year-old boy who had implicated himself in the attacks by his attitude. Even if it turned out that he had nothing to do with the attacks, the joy that he took from the misfortune of others was disturbing. Sighing aloud, he decided to begin the interrogation.

"Mr. Nott, we have reason to suspect you to either know something about or to be involved somehow with the attacks that have taken place recently, and are therefore, in accordance with the rules that came into affect at the beginning of term, going to administer veritaserum to you and ask a few questions."

The boy looked livid as his face turned pink. "You can't do that! My father..."

"Agreed to the new rules by sending you here," said McGonagall sternly. "Everyone else has to follow them. So do you."

He started moving to get out of the chair, only to partially petrified by Flitwick. All Nott could move was his face. Professor Dumbledore, with a pained expression on his face, forced three drops of the truth serum down his throat. Theodore's expression immediately changed to one of peace and happiness.

"That's better. What's your name?"

"Theodore Zacchaeus Nott."

"Do you know how the Chamber of Secrets is being opened?"

"Yes." While Dumbledore had suspected this, this is one time he wished he were wrong.

"How was it opened?"

"Which time?"

The four heads of house gazed in shock over the answer that the boy had given to this question. Dumbledore continued asking questions.

“Do you mean to say that it has been opened more than one way this year?”

“Yes.”

“How was it opened the first time, when Mrs. Filch was killed?”

Nott grinned even more broadly than the veritaserum was making him. “The Dark Lord honored me. He possessed me, allowing me to speak his blessed language and open the Chamber.” Dumbledore and the others thought they were going to be ill.

“Is the entrance in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom?”

“Yes.”

“Is the creature down there a basilisk?”

“Yes.”

“While possessed by Voldemort, were you able to speak to it?”

“Yes.”

“Did you leave the message on the wall outside the bathroom?”

“Yes.”

“How was the chamber opened the next time?”

“I brought the Dark Lord’s snake, Nagini, with me to school. She opened it the rest of the times. I believe that the Dark Lord possesses her at those times.”

“Where is she right now?”

“I don’t know. After I opened the Chamber the first time, she left and hasn’t returned to me.”

“Why were you given this...assignment?” asked McGonagall, afraid of the answer.

“My father persuaded the Dark Lord that I would be able to do it after I asked him to.”

“Why did you ask him to do that?” asked Dumbledore.

“I wanted to be the one killing mudbloods,” Nott said with a smile.

“Do you have any regrets about what you’ve been part of?”

“I regret that Potter didn’t die.”

Professor Dumbledore, with a sad expression on his face, picked up the wand that had been placed on his desk before the interrogation began.

“It is with a sad heart that I am forced to do this. As headmaster of this school, I hereby expel you from Hogwarts. As Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, I hereby snap your wand.” With a swift motion, he put the wand in both hands and broke it in half. “As a wizarding citizen, I hereby place you under Wizard’s arrest until the aurors arrive.”

He took a deep breath. “It is fortunate for you that you are so young. If you were an adult, you would be sentenced much more harshly. As it is, I expect that after your trial, your memories of magic will be erased from your mind, your magical powers will be blocked, and you will be sent to live as a muggle.”

“WHAT!?!” shouted the boy. The bliss caused by the potion was dissolving. “You can’t make me a filthy muggle!”

“Perhaps we should let Mr. Filch punish him after he is awakened and learns that Mr. Nott is responsible for his cat’s death,” said Flitwick. “I understand that he keeps specialized equipment in his office for cases like this.”

Nott paled and sat still as Dumbledore fire-called the aurors.

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After Dumbledore had made sure all the students had boarded the train – Harry’s friends had been particularly difficult to convince to leave him behind – Dumbledore helped Poppy move most of the patients to St. Mungo’s. Only one patient wasn’t taken there, and the headmaster felt that it would be too tempting of a target for Riddle to have a defenseless Harry Potter at the public hospital. Instead, after discussing the situation with Sirius Black, they came up with a different place for Harry to stay.

After Sirius Black and Albus Dumbledore with put the Potter Cottage located near Hogwarts under the Fidelius Charm (with Albus as Secret-Keeper), Sirius carried Harry’s stiff body into the master bedroom with Albus following close behind.

“So, what do we do now?” asked Padfoot anxiously.

Dumbledore sighed. “As I explained to you earlier today, we can’t do anything until Harry is awake and can open...”

“I know what you said, but there’s got to be something that we can do. We’re going to be facing a basilisk! There’s got to be some way we can defend ourselves from dying the moment we see it!”

Dumbledore removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes wearily. “I just don’t see...wait a minute! That just might work!” He pulled his own shrunken trunk out of a pocket and expanded it. After opening a compartment, he pulled out a book. “There may be a way.” The twinkle returned to Dumbledore’s eyes.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 24 – The Sound of Victory**

Darkness and quiet. That's all that was in his world. Deep down he had some vague memory of a world that wasn't like that, but for the past eternity all Harry Potter knew was emptiness. If he concentrated hard enough, he could recall looking through a ghost and seeing a huge snake just before his senses stopped working, but he usually didn't bother. He had no way of knowing how much time had passed, nor what time of day it was. Concepts like that had lost all meaning for him. He simply existed. He knew there was more to life than this, but he realized that it wasn't for him anymore. Sometimes that thought made him happy as he now understood he wouldn't have to face his enemy anymore. Suddenly his peaceful world started changing.

He felt his senses slowly begin functioning as light began to shine into his dark existence, hurting his...eyes, if he remembered right. His...ears (yes, that's it) began to hurt as they picked up the sounds of many voices that he couldn't separate just yet. His mind began functioning at full capacity once more as his memories became much clearer. He heard a familiar voice saying his name as he began blinking his eyes.

"Harry?"

He blinked his eyes again and managed to turn his stiff neck in the direction of the sound. He saw the image of a girl with bushy brown hair, and for the first time in a month, his facial expression changed. It was harder to smile than he recalled, so he didn't smile as widely as he wanted to. He opened and closed his mouth, remembering its use. His raspy voice managed to speak. "Hermione?"

"Yes!" she said as she engulfed her boyfriend in a tight hug. "You're awake!"

After a few seconds, another familiar voice said, "Miss Granger, I believe you'll need to allow Mr. Potter a few minutes to readjust. His petrification won't have any lasting effects on him, but his muscles haven't been used for awhile, so he'll have to practice using them again. He should be back to normal by tomorrow."

"I'll bet I know what muscles Hermione wants to help Harry practice with," said another female voice, causing him to blush. Harry looked around and saw that Ginny had made the last comment, and then he looked around again to see who else was there. He smiled even more broadly as he realized so many people were there with him.

"Hi, Ginny, Ron, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Fred, George, Sirius, Professor Dumbledore, and Madam Pomfrey. What happened?" He glanced around again. "Where am I?" He coughed lightly. "I'm thirsty."

While Madam Pomfrey fetched a glass of water for her patient, the others explained how he'd been petrified by a basilisk almost a month before (it was now December 27th), Hogwarts had been closed, and he'd been brought to Potter Cottage in Scotland. After he'd emptied his glass, Madam Pomfrey had him get up, which was a difficult process, but Harry was stubborn enough to make his legs walk. After an hour, all his muscles were sore, even his facial ones after his healer had him make faces at her. "You get some rest for a few hours and walk to the dining room when you wake up."

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Hermione was sitting at a rather large table eating lunch with Sirius and the Weasleys that had been in Harry's room earlier that day. Percy had elected to stay at the Burrow rather than visit the reason he didn't make Head Boy. Bill and Charlie had gone back to their jobs in Egypt and Romania respectively after spending Christmas with their family.

Once he'd left Harry's room, Dumbledore had gone back to Hogsmeade, where he'd been staying at the Hog's Head. He was fearful that Voldemort would take this opportunity to attack Hogwarts, so he made it public that he was still guarding the castle, along with an undisclosed number of supporters. He was hoping this would discourage or at least delay Riddle from making any such plans.

Despite the news of Voldemort's activities that were still being reported, Hermione was happier now than she had been for nearly a month. She was brought out of her reflections by Ron's voice.

“Do you think Dumbledore’s gonna make Harry take him into the Chamber of Secrets now that he’s awake? Assuming that you guys are right that he’s a Parselmouth, I mean?”

“I hope not,” said Ginny, “That would be horrible. Can you imagine what else might be in there besides the basilisk? Nothing could make me go down there!” She cringed.

“Don’t worry,” said Mrs. Weasley, “I’m sure that Professor Dumbledore wouldn’t do that. Even if he absolutely needs Harry to open the Chamber for him, I’m sure he’ll...”

“Open the Chamber for him?” came Harry’s voice from the other side of the room. He was walking slowly but normally. “How could I open the Chamber of Secrets if he can’t?”

Hermione looked nervous as she got up and walked toward her boyfriend. “Well, er, you see, we think you’re a Parselmouth.”

“A what?”

“A Parselmouth. It means you can talk to snakes.”

“Sure. I once set a python after my cousin...er, accidentally of course. But I’m sure a lot of people can...” Every eye was on Harry now.

“No they can’t. It’s a rare gift, Harry. Right now, Voldemort is the only known Parselmouth in the world. That’s why Professor Dumbledore needs you. He’s found the entrance to the Chamber but believes that only a Parselmouth can open it.”

“You are quite correct, Miss Granger,” said Dumbledore, who’d apparently just returned. He turned to Harry. “I’m afraid that I do need to request your assistance, Mr. Potter, if Hogwarts is to ever reopen. I do have a plan, but require your talent if it is to succeed.”

“So basically if I ever want Hogwarts to reopen I’ve got to help you?”

“I’m afraid so,” Dumbledore agreed sadly. “I do feel bad about putting you back in danger, but it is the only way. We’ll talk privately after lunch and I’ll explain the plan. If you and Madam Pomfrey, who will be

here after dinner, will agree, we, that is myself, you, and Sirius, will go to Hogwarts first thing on the day after tomorrow. Everything is ready except you.”

Professor Dumbledore and Harry joined them at the table, and Harry got his first meal in nearly a month. Hermione kept quiet, but she was angry that the headmaster would guilt-trip Harry into helping as soon as he was given the mandrake potion. She felt that he needed a bit more time to heal up properly. She knew it would be useless to try talking Harry out of it now, and she also knew she'd never forgive Dumbledore if anything happened to Harry down there.

Other healers had helped the other victims at St. Mungo's about the same time that Harry had been treated. She'd heard that Mr. Filch had had a nervous breakdown when he was told of Mrs. Norris' demise and was moved to the mental health ward when he began listing the punishments he expected Theodore Nott to endure for his crimes. His healer intends to find out if Mr. Filch actually has the torture devices that he described once Hogwarts is safe.

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When Harry, Sirius, and Albus came out to the living room after their talk, all three of them were smiling brightly. Harry stopped as he noticed something he didn't expect to see.

“You've still got a Christmas tree up, with presents underneath. They can't all be mine.”

“Of course not, silly,” answered Hermione. “It's got the presents you bought for me, Sirius and the Weasleys.”

“Actually,” said Sirius, “It's all of mine.”

Harry smiled even more. “You didn't have to wait for me...”

“We wanted to celebrate Christmas with you,” said Ginny, and looking at the others, he saw they all agreed.

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Two days later, Harry, Sirius, and Dumbledore arrived in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom via portkey. They were all wearing what appeared to be tinted safety glasses that were strapped on their heads so they couldn't fall off. Harry got off the floor where he'd fallen when they arrived and looked around. He saw that Dumbledore was still holding the cage he'd brought with him that contained a rooster that was wearing a miniature version of the same goggles they were wearing. Dumbledore had charmed the rooster's glasses so that they wouldn't be noticed by the bird so he wouldn't be uncomfortable. The cage itself had been charmed so that nothing (like Nagini) would be able to break into it and attack the occupant.

"Are either of you unclear about any aspect of the plan?" asked Dumbledore.

"We get the rooster down there, make sure the basilisk shows up, and you use the Imperius curse to make it crow while Sirius and I protect you and the bird."

"Quite right, Mr. Potter. I would like to remind you that the use of this curse on a human being would put you in Azkaban for life. It's not something I'd do lightly, even to an animal, but it's the only way I can be sure that it will crow at the proper time."

"Are you sure these glasses will work, Albus?"

"As sure as possible without testing it, Sirius. I believe that we will be able to look the beast in the eyes with no ill affects, however, I would suggest trying not to test it, just in case. Do both of you have your emergency portkeys?" When they both nodded, Albus continued. "Good. Harry, I want you to leave immediately if anything goes wrong or you are in immediate danger."

"Okay."

"Now, I want you to focus on this carving and tell the sink to open."

Harry looked at the carved snake for about thirty seconds, and hissed, "*Open!*" The trio watched in wonder as the sinks moved around, eventually revealing a hole.

“Although logic suggests that we look before we leap, circumstances dictate otherwise. I’ll go first. Don’t follow me until I’ve called back to you.” With that said, the old man, holding the birdcage to his chest, walked up to the hole and jumped in. Harry and Sirius grinned at each other when they heard him shout, “Weeeeeee,” like a little kid. Eventually, they heard him shout, “My, my, I haven’t had this much fun in years. Do hurry up.”

Harry went first, followed closely by Sirius. Padfoot was the first to speak. “I have to admit that it was the best slide I’ve ridden in a long time, even if it did leave us filthy.”

“I’d suggest not cleaning ourselves until we are finished getting dirty,” said Dumbledore sagely with a twinkle in his eyes. “I would suggest that we carry our wands from here.”

They began walking after Dumbledore lit his wand. None actually commented on the rat skeletons they were stepping on. They soon found something. “Interesting, it appears to be a snakeskin.”

Harry swallowed. “H, How big would you say the snake that shed it is, Professor Dumbledore?”

“Well, it’s bigger than twenty feet long, that much is certain.”

“Twenty feet?” exclaimed Sirius. “Bloody hell!”

“Actually, this appears to have been shed years ago, so the basilisk is no doubt much bigger now.” Upon seeing the looks on the younger faces, Albus said, “It is ironic that no matter how big it is, all it takes is a rooster crowing to kill it. It is further interesting that while its sight can kill others, its hearing can kill it.”

“As interesting as that is,” said Sirius, “I’d like to get this over with if you don’t mind.”

“I quite agree,” said Dumbledore, “It wouldn’t do to let an old man’s ramblings delay us from our quest. Come, Harry.”

They continued walking down the path, which kept twisting and turning until they ran across a solid wall on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

Upon quickly examining them, Dumbledore looked at the youngest member of his party. "Mr. Potter, if you please."

Harry looked into the emeralds and hissed, "*Open*," revealing the legendary Chamber of Secrets. All three of them looked at the statues of snakes as they walked around the apparently empty room until they faced the huge statue of Salazar Slytherin.

"That is one ugly git!" exclaimed Sirius.

"You've got that right," agreed Harry, "but where do you suppose the basilisk is?"

"If I may make a suggestion," said Albus, "As you both know, the Dark Mark features a snake crawling out of the mouth of a skull. What if it was inspired by this chamber?"

Harry's eyes widened in comprehension. "You mean that the basilisk comes out of Salazar's mouth?"

"Precisely."

"It's as good a guess as any," said Sirius. "Harry?"

He walked up to the statue and hissed, "*Open*." Nothing happened. "It's not opening," he said in English.

"Perhaps there's a password," suggested Dumbledore. "Probably something complimenting how great Slytherin was. According to every reference I've read, Mr. Slytherin was quite arrogant."

"But what could it be exactly?"

"*Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.*"

Harry looked back at them in disbelief. "Do you really think it would be..."



“That wasn’t us talking,” said Sirius urgently, “It was something hissing!”

“What?” shouted Harry before he heard the mouth of the statue opening. “Oww!” He fell to the floor as he felt something bite his leg.

“Harry!” shouted Sirius as he took a step toward him.

“No! Watch Dumbledore. The snake is coming!” While Harry was talking, he was pointing his wand at Nagini. “Reducto!” The blast deflected off of the snake’s powerful skin, but caused it to turn back, giving Harry a perfect, “Reducto!” shot into its mouth just as the basilisk made its appearance.

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At the same time that Harry was bitten, Albus Dumbledore pointed his wand at the rooster. “Sonorus. Imperio!” The bird went perfectly still, ready to take any orders. Dumbledore waited, listening to Harry’s spells, until finally he saw the basilisk’s nose. He instructed the rooster to start crowing and keep on crowing until he told it to stop. Soon the entire chamber was reverberating with the sound. Only Albus noticed the extra scream that came with Nagini’s death.

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At the same time Harry watched the basilisk that hadn’t even fully emerged fall dead, he noticed something else appear right above him. He couldn’t hear the customary phoenix song over the noise of the rooster, but he did see and feel the bird land on his leg and begin weeping into the wound, stopping the poison from filling his body.

“Thanks, Fawkes.”

Dumbledore released the rooster from both spells, much to the relief of all present, who were growing tired of its amplified song. Sirius ran over to Harry and helped him to his feet.

“Are you alright, Harry?”

"I'm fine, Sirius," he assured him. "Fawkes sorted me out." The bird, which was now perched on Harry's shoulder, chirped in agreement.

"Thank you very much for your help, Harry. You'll be receiving an award for special services to the school, as will Miss Granger for her information. If you'll stay here with us, you'll get an opportunity for extra credit in potions. The body of a basilisk is filled with many rare, valuable potion ingredients."

He looked at Dumbledore and then the dead sixty foot snake. "No thanks. My potions grade isn't that bad." He then activated his portkey and disappeared just as Fawkes flew to Dumbledore, leaving Sirius and Albus to examine the basilisk's insides.

Please review. Thank you to those who have. Sorry I took so long to update.

I've taken some liberty with my description of Harry's petrification since the books actually don't describe what it was like. Many believe that the victims could see and hear, and were therefore aware of what was going on during the process, and that might even be true, but not in this story. I also think that muscle that hasn't been used in a month would need to be worked a bit before going back to normal.

I know they didn't test the glasses, but would you want to be the one to do it? I hope you agree that under these circumstances Dumbledore would use the Imperius curse on a rooster, only making it crow.

## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 25 – Getting Back to Normal**

*'Dear Parent and Student,*

*It is my pleasure to inform you that the legendary Chamber of Secrets has been found and the basilisk within destroyed. Therefore Hogwarts is safe once more and will be reopening on Monday, January 6th as originally scheduled. The Hogwarts Express will leave from Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  at Kings Cross Station at 11 a.m. that day. Awards for special services to the school have been given to Gryffindor students Harry Potter and Hermione Granger for their involvement in the elimination of this threat.*

*For nearly 1,000 years, members of Hogwarts' staff have attempted to solve the mystery of the Chamber of Secrets. Miss Granger solved it in a month. As soon as he was revived, Mr. Potter insisted on joining the team assigned to enter the Chamber when it was realized that his unique talents were required to gain entrance.*

*It is thanks to their efforts, along with Sirius Black's (who was on the team with Mr. Potter and myself), that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry can reopen.*

*We will expect all students to return for the new term unless we are otherwise notified.*

*Sincerely,*

*Albus Dumbledore - Headmaster'*

It was with a twinkle in his eyes that Albus finished the final draft of this letter. Although he realized Harry didn't like the attention, he knew that wizarding society needed to believe in the Boy-Who-Lived. Besides, he felt that Harry (as well as Hermione) did deserve the credit. That boy was one of the bravest people he'd ever met. He quickly performed the spell to have it duplicated with the appropriate names placed on each copy. He would summon a house elf to tie each one onto an owl.

He was exhausted after going into the Chamber, gutting a basilisk, and finally returning and taking a shower (scourgify spells just weren't the same as a real shower), but he wanted to get the good news out as soon as possible. After giving an elf his assignment, he headed back to his own bed in the Headmaster's suite. It was good to be home.

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Harry, on the other hand, was getting his second lecture from Hermione since getting back. The first one was the danger he was in, but after he told her and his other friends what had happened, she started lecturing him about something he hadn't expected.

"You had the opportunity to study the remains of a basilisk up close and refused! Do you realize the educational experience you've missed just because you were squeamish? Not to mention the extra credit you could have gotten!"

"I'd have probably *contaminated* the products by barfing! I did not want to see what a basilisk's insides look like!"

"I don't blame you at all, Harry!" said Ginny. "That's would've been gross!"

"Disgusting!" agreed Ron.

"So you didn't mind walking on rat skeletons, risking your life, getting bitten by a snake, and blasting its head off, but you would mind dissecting a basilisk?"

"Exactly," he nodded.

She let out a scream of frustration.

"I'll bet Sirius will wish he'd left too before he's done."

"You're right about that, pup," said a voice from the doorway.

"Sirius!" Harry said happily. He started to get up before he noticed the blood, etc, that was covering his godfather. He was a filthy mess. He

sat back down. "I think Hermione will want to watch your memory of that obviously pleasant event."

"I'll be glad to give it to her," he said shuddering. "I don't want the memory. We even took the teeth. Dumbledore said something about them having properties that can destroy certain cursed objects. Maybe he was talking about the venom. I don't know. All I know is that I'm glad to be out of there."

"I'll bet my parents would love to see those teeth," commented Hermione excitedly.

Sirius shook his head at her enthusiasm. "I'm gonna go take a shower."

"Good idea."

-

Harry wasn't really surprised by the stares he received when he boarded the Hogwarts Express, but he didn't like them anyway. It had started the moment he, the Weasleys, and Hermione stepped through the barrier onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters.

The first thing Harry noticed was about ten aurors standing at strategic locations around the platform. He thought it was a very good idea. The whole wizarding world found out (or at least should have) what a coward Voldemort was when he attacked a one-year-old baby at Godric's Hollow. He'd think nothing of attacking eleven-year-olds on their way to school. Harry couldn't help but notice the looks of admiration they were giving him, even after the normal glance at his scar. When he tried to ignore them, he realized that almost everyone was looking at him. He also noted that some of them were looking at his girlfriend, too.

"Come on," said Hermione, tugging his arm. "Let's get onto the train before they ask for autographs." Judging by the way her face was turning pink, Harry figured she'd realized that they were looking at her, too.

They had expected it after the Daily Prophet printed an excerpt from the letter Dumbledore had sent everyone. However, expecting it doesn't make it welcome. After they'd taken a few steps (while dragging their trunks), they heard a camera flash and turned to see a photographer and several reporters with quills and parchment floating next to them. They looked at each other and ran for it while Ron and Ginny got between them and the reporters.

They managed to board the train, doing their best to ignore their names being yelled and quickly made their way to the last compartment and closed the window and door.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Hermione with a grin. They were slightly panting from their efforts, but could still talk normally.

"Why can't they leave me – I guess now it's us – alone and bother someone else?"

"I don't..." She stopped and pulled out her wand, pointing it at the window where Harry now noticed a member of the press staring into with his face pressed against it. She muttered a spell and the window turned black. Satisfied with her work, she turned her attention back to her boyfriend. "That's better!" and scooted closer to him on the seat.

"Much," he agreed as he reached one hand toward her cheek. By the look in his eyes Hermione could tell he was going to kiss her. She closed her eyes in anticipation. Suddenly the door opened.

"There you are!" came Ginny's voice. She sounded amused. Hermione opened her eyes miserably.

"Can't you two keep your hands off each other for two seconds?" asked Ron, who was right behind.

"Er, if we're intruding, we should go," said Neville, who was behind Ron carrying a plant.

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, "Of course you're not intruding. Come on in."

Hermione moved closer to the window, and Harry scooted closer to her. Ron sat on Harry's other side. Ginny sat across from Hermione, and Neville, with his ears turning pink, sat next to her (not as close as Harry was to Hermione). Harry happily noticed that Ginny blushed a bit.

"So, Neville, what have you been up to since school was let out?" asked Harry.

"Er, well, I, I've been working on my g-greenhouse."

Ginny looked fascinated. "Really? You have a greenhouse?"

"Yeah. You see..."

For the next half-hour, Neville explained the different plants that were in his greenhouse and the charms that kept it warm in all kinds of weather. Ginny was hanging on every word. It was finally interrupted by a scene that made Harry want to laugh.

"Well, look what we have here. Pottier and his gang."

The speaker was none other than Pansy Parkinson. Now she was flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. What amused Harry wasn't their appearance. It was the fact that Crabbe and Goyle were always someone's bodyguards, and that someone always had to visit him on the train. He briefly thought of using his air elemental power to blow Pansy's skirt up to embarrass her. Then he decided he didn't want to see that much of her. Besides, Hermione might not approve. He'd have to settle for fire again. He kept his hands away from his wand despite the fact that the three Slytherins (as well as his friends) were holding theirs.

Chuckling, he looked at the two goons. "I see you've found a new master again like good little puppies. I really can't understand why anybody thinks you squibs are useful."

"They have their uses, Pottier! Did you enjoy that 'ittle nap you took? The whole school had to close just for y...Ahhhh!" At that moment, she began hopping on one foot as she started kicking the other off. It was on fire. "What did you..."

Her question was cut off as both the goons found a bigger problem. The backs of their pants were on fire and they were screaming like little girls. They were each giving themselves spankings against the wall in their attempt to put out the fire. The Gryffindors couldn't stop themselves from laughing at the scene in front of them.

Pansy managed to get her burning shoe off only to find that her skirt was now in flames. She suddenly remembered she was a witch and used the water spell on herself, effectively soaking her skirt. Hermione then performed the banishing spell on all three of them, effectively pushing them out the door. Ginny then closed it, and Harry finally pulled out his wand and warded it so they couldn't be interrupted again.

"I guess Pansy's taking Nott's place as Voldemort's Hogwarts contact."

Neville chuckled, "He sure is scraping the bottom of the barrel."

Ginny looked at the item Pansy had left behind with a grin. "What should we do with her shoe?"

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Here's a challenge for anyone interested. Write an original fanfic based off of the first scene of this story where Harry persuades Dumbledore to answer his questions and give him full disclosure at the end of the first book. You can pair Harry with any nonSlytherin female of your choice. Just let me know if you post the story. I think I'd enjoy reading someone else's idea of what would've happened if Dumbledore stopped keeping his secrets from Harry.



## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 26 – Pansy's Shoe**

Harry, Hermione, Ron, Neville, and Ginny were still sitting together on the train, deciding what to do with Pansy Parkinson's shoe, which had been left behind after her 'threatening' visit.

"I say we charm it to start dancing the moment someone puts it on, and leave it outside the door so it looks like we didn't do anything to it. She'll look for it before we reach Hogsmeade and think that's where it ended up," suggested Ginny, who was sitting very close to Neville.

"What if she checks it for a spell?" asked Hermione.

Harry grinned at his girlfriend. "Not everyone's as bright as you. I'll bet you a galleon that she doesn't check."

"You're on." BOOM!!!!

They heard a loud explosion that sounded as though it was just in front of the train. Suddenly the Hogwarts Express lurched to a sudden stop. Everyone in their compartment fell toward the front. Hermione was on top of Harry. Neville was on top of Ginny. Ron was stretched out over all of them.

"Ouch. That's my foot, Ron," said Hermione as he stepped on her.

"Sorry."

They were just getting untangled when Harry grabbed his scar in pain and went down on his knees.

"He's here." No one had to ask who Harry meant by that. Hermione helped her boyfriend to his feet while everyone else pulled out his or her wand. Once he was standing, both of them pulled their wands out as well.

"Are you alright?" asked Ginny.

"I'm fine. I reinforced my occlumency. That just caught me by surprise."

"That's good," said Neville.

"This was obviously a trap set for you," the brightest witch of her age declared. "He knew he'd find you here."

Harry took a deep breath. "I suppose so. I wish all the..." He glanced at Neville and Ron. He was going to say that he wished the Horcruxes had all been found and destroyed, but knew that was very sensitive information, especially with Voldemort nearby and ready to read anybody's mind. "Never mind."

He was saved from explaining what he was going to say by Hermione suggesting, "Harry, disguise yourself so Voldemort can't recognize you." Neville and Ron flinched at the name, but the others ignored them.

"How can you disg...Wow!" said Neville as he watched Harry close his eyes and concentrate. Now he was looking at a blond first-year with blue eyes wearing clothes that were way too big on him.

Hermione shrunk the clothes with her wand. "This should help. Now let's get out of here before we find ourselves trapped."

"What about the Invisibility cloak?" asked Ron.

"I don't think that'll work against Riddle. We don't have time to get into my trunk anyway. Let's go." It was weird for Harry's voice to come out of that little boy's mouth.

He opened up the window and climbed out, landing on his feet. The scene before him was complete chaos. The train had stopped just before crossing a blown up bridge over a river. There were about three dozen Death Eaters in the area, torturing students about twenty feet away from him. A group of first-years were being led out at wand point by Pansy (who was wearing a different pair of shoes), Crabbe, and Goyle. The two goons were pushing some of the children for not moving fast enough. Fortunately, none of the kids he could see were lying on the ground dead. Harry hadn't been noticed yet.

Hermione landed beside him, holding some sort of round shield in her left hand.

“Where’d you get that?” he whispered.

“I transfigured Pansy’s shoe into it. I thought it might be useful.”

While Neville was landing next to her, one of the Death Eaters had his wand pointed at a blonde girl wearing Ravenclaw robes. She looked vaguely familiar to Harry. The criminal was screaming at her so Harry could hear what was being said.

“If you can’t give me a straight answer, girl, then you’ve outlived your usefulness! Avada...”

Harry pointed his wand and without a sound cast an ‘expelliarmus’ at the masked figure, causing the wand to fly out of his hand in Harry’s direction. He was surprised he’d been able to do it. He’d never managed a nonverbal spell before. However, he caught the Death Eater’s attention.

“How DARE you interfere, you little boy! Judging by those muggle clothes, you’re probably a mudblood and don’t know who you’re messing with!” He pulled a spare wand out of a leg holster and pointed it at Harry. “Too bad. Avada Kedavra!”

A beam of green light shot toward Harry’s middle. He was moving to the left, but the body he was in couldn’t move fast enough. He was convinced his arm would get hit, and he would die.

Suddenly, there was a small explosion in front of him, and he felt a bit of shrapnel hit his stomach and arms. He glanced at Hermione to see she was no longer holding the shield, and realized what had happened. She’d throw it like a Frisbee to intercept the death curse. “Thanks,” he whispered. He glanced back at his opponent to see that he was on the ground with the Ravenclaw girl pointing her wand at him. He suddenly remembered that she was Ginny’s friend he’d met in the library just minutes before he’d been petrified by the basilisk. Her name was Luna...something.

Harry suddenly got a plan as he saw Voldemort beyond the other Death Eaters looking around, probably for him. Riddle’s amplified voice said in his menacing way, “Come out from wherever you are,

Harry Potter, and we'll leave the rest of your pathetic classmates alone.

Harry whispered, "Neville, Hermione, use your elements to bury the Death Eaters. I'll take care of Moldyshorts." Without waiting for an answer, he moved to get a better view of his nemesis.

Suddenly, Tom Riddle's body was surrounded by flames. For a moment, a look of terror crossed his face until he used his wand to put out the flames. At the same time, Death Eaters were yelling something about quicksand as they sank. When they tried to use their wands, the wooden sticks caught fire and fell into the quicksand as Ginny used her element.

Harry concentrated more and a powerful burst of wind knocked Voldemort to the ground. Potter was surprised to see Riddle's clothes catch fire at the same moment he started sinking in quicksand. Harry sent another gust of wind down on his fallen foe to increase the speed of his descent. He knew it wouldn't kill Tom, but it would hurt him. He saw Riddle's red eyes fill with rage for a moment before he flicked the wand he was still holding and disappeared.

Harry slipped into the shadows and quickly changed back to himself (after restoring his clothes to their original size). He realized that he was still bleeding from the shrapnel that had hit him, but not badly. He then looked around to see dozens of Death Eaters, including Pansy's trio, buried to their necks in solid dirt. Many of the students were stupefying them to stop their struggling. A few, like Seamus Finnegan, were kicking their heads while they were still awake.

He saw Lee Jordan, Fred, and George in a tight circle around one and heard the sound of leaking water coming from the middle, along with several vile profanities coming from their victim. He noticed a Death Eater mask, presumably from their victim, on the ground behind Lee. He couldn't help but chuckle at that scene. He briefly considered joining the three pranksters before he heard a zipping sound. He nearly fell down laughing when they walked away, revealing Lucius Malfoy's face and hair dripping with pee. He noticed a flash and spun around to see Colin Creevey with his camera, immortalizing to look on Lucius' face.

His smile faded instantly when he noticed a group that was not so fortunate – the prefects. Several, including Percy, were lying down having muscle spasms due to extreme exposure to the cruciatus curse. The Head Boy and Girl, a Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw respectively, were lying down dead. Percy seemed to be staring at the murdered head girl in shock, even as his body spasmed. It was Penelope Clearwater, Percy's old girlfriend.

Harry felt a hand grab his gently. He didn't have to look around to recognize Hermione's hand. He turned toward her, and saw Ron, Neville, and Ginny with her, looking for instructions. "The prefect's obviously aren't in any shape to help. Hermione and I are going to walk toward the front of the train. Why don't Ginny and Ron walk toward the back? Look around for any Death Eaters or wounded students. Neville, see if you can find a student who knows some first aid."

They all nodded and Harry walked off silently with Hermione, looking in every compartment, but finding them void of occupants, often with baggage and candy all over the floor. They finally reached the front, to find the conductor and the 'snack lady' dead. Hermione finally broke the silence.

"It looks like they killed or tortured anyone they thought might be a threat. I doubt they were able to send for help before they died, but there had to be a way for communication. She looked around for a moment, and then noticed a small mirror on a wall. "I'm going to feel really foolish if this doesn't work." She walked up to the mirror. "Ministry of Magic."

For a moment, nothing happened, but then suddenly the face of a bored-looking middle-aged woman with brown hair that was just beginning to gray appeared on the mirror. She looked annoyed. "This is the Ministry of Magic, not a playground. What are you doing wasting our time by calling us, little girl? Shouldn't you be at Hogwarts?"

"For your information, the Hogwarts Express was just attacked by Death Eaters and I'm calling from the train!" Hermione said in as civil a tone as she could manage. "All the adults and both head students

were killed, and the prefects were hurt. That's why I'm calling you. We need help."

The woman looked shaken up. "This better not be a crank. Where are you located?"

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Within a few minutes, several aurors and healers apparated to the area. After the captured Death Eaters were portkeyed straight from the ground to holding cells (taking lots of dirt with them), the uninjured students were portkeyed to Hogwarts with a half-hour to clean up before dinner, which was now changed from a feast to a memorial for those that did not survive. The injured were either taken to St. Mungo's or Hogwarts' Hospital Wing, depending on how serious their injuries. Harry, with his minor cuts from the shield/shoe that saved his life, was sent to the hospital wing, where he was treated and forced to spend the night.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 27 – Keeping Secrets**

*“You-Know-Who Attacks Hogwarts Express – Thwarted by Unknown Elemental Magician*

*By Anna Jesse*

*Yesterday morning, the Hogwarts Express was transporting all the students back to the famed wizarding school after an extended leave of absence due to the Chamber of Secrets business last year. Death Eaters used the Reducto curse on a bridge moments before the train was to cross it. Fortunately, the conductor, Franco Calamet, was able to stop the express before it plummeted into the river below. However, that was only the beginning.*

*Once the train was stopped, about three dozen Death Eaters boarded the train. They killed Mr. Calamet, Mary Plummet – the ‘snack lady,’ Justin Philips – the Head Boy, and Penelope Clearwater – the Head Girl. Some gathered the prefects together and tortured them by means of the unforgivable Cruciatus curse, while others rounded up the rest of the students, leading them out of the train. Joining the Death Eaters, roughly leading first-years off the train, were Slytherin students Pansy Parkinson, Vincent Crabbe, and Gregory Goyle – all of whom were only third-years, but had already chosen the dark path. Other older students made the same choice, but to this reporter, these were the saddest cases.*

*Once the students were off the train, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named showed up and attempted to call out Harry Potter, claiming he’d leave the other students alone if the Boy-Who-Lived surrendered. Before there was time for any response, the ground below the Death Eaters turned into quicksand, and they all sank down to their necks before the ground re-stabilized. At the same time, their wands caught fire, causing the attackers to drop them in the dirt. You-Know-Who’s body was suddenly covered with flames before he started to sink as well before he disappeared, leaving all of his fallen comrades to their fate. Among the captured Death Eaters was the escaped Lucius Malfoy (pictured above), who is rumored to be the top-ranking Death Eater.*

*Once the threat was gone, Harry Potter and a group of his friends took charge, contacted the Ministry, and tended to the injured students.*

*Judging by the way the attackers were subdued, the only explanation is that one or more elemental magicians captured them. The question is where they came from. Were they special aurors from the Ministry on the train, someone hired by Professor Dumbledore as a guard, or were they students? Neither the Minister of Magic nor the Headmaster of Hogwarts was available for comment."*

Harry, who'd been released from the Hospital wing a few minutes before, laughed at the pictured of an angry, pee-drenched Lucius Malfoy on the front page of the Daily Prophet. He still couldn't believe that Fred, George, and Lee had all 'christened' Lucius, and wished he'd joined them. The rest of the story went on to say that all the underage students who joined the Death Eaters were expelled from Hogwarts and would probably be sent to the wizarding equivalent of St. Brutus' school until they turned seventeen. They would then be on probation, which meant that if they got involved in any trouble, they'd spend the rest of their lives in Azkaban. Harry wondered if they'd claim the 'Imperius' curse when they actually had their trials. He also wondered who Voldemort's new contacts at Hogwarts would be.

He looked over at the Slytherin table to see that about a fourth of it was empty. He hadn't realized that so many of them had joined in the attack. With a grin, he noted that of the remaining Slytherins, very few had participated in the bullying he'd helped stop. Perhaps now Hogwarts would be a bit safer, but he made a mental note to make sure the patrolling continued.

"Can I see it, Harry?" asked Hermione, who was sitting on his right. He blinked for a moment as he figured out what his girlfriend meant. He then handed her the newspaper.

"Here you go."

"Thanks," she said.

"Is there any mention of..." said Ginny, who was sitting across from them next to Neville. Ron was sitting on Harry's left stuffing his face.



Hermione interrupted Ginny, to make sure she didn't give any secrets away. "It says that unknown elemental magicians defeated the Death Eaters."

"Interesting," said Neville nonchalantly.

"They have no idea who it was," added Harry.

"Good," said Ginny.

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After the exciting train ride, Harry settled into a boring if time-consuming routine of classes, homework, Quidditch, exercise, private defense lessons with Flitwick, teaching those same private lessons to Hermione and Ginny, and dueling club with Lupin. Harry, Hermione, and Ginny were still planning on asking to take D.A.D.A. O.W.L.s at the end of the year, and so were studying theory on that a lot (the dueling club and advanced dueling they were studying focused on the practical aspect). Harry was continuing to work on his dueling strategy against Voldemort – use his breathing problem against him by getting him exhausted. He planned to be able to run circles around the Dork Lord without breaking a sweat while his enemy panted and wheezed. He secretly hoped Tommy would pass out during their duel. He had learned the counter-curse to the bubble-head charm just in case Voldemort found a way to modify that to help him breathe.

The patrolling was even getting boring now with the Slytherins subdued, and Harry had the frequency of them reduced. Occasionally they'd break up a one-on-one fight between people of random houses, but the bullying seemed to have stopped. Unfortunately, the Hogsmeade visits had stopped as well.

Harry, Hermione, and Ginny were patrolling the halls near the entrance hall about a half hour before curfew one Saturday night when they heard the gate open, followed by a set of fast-moving footsteps.

"I wonder what's going on," said Ginny.

"I guess we should investigate," said Hermione.

Harry agreed, so they did. They found the last thing Harry ever expected to see – Sirius Black floating an unconscious Dumbledore in front of him.

“Padfoot,” he called out, “What’s going on?”

“Oh, I’m just taking a stroll with the Headmaster to the Hospital wing.”

“What happened?” asked Hermione concernedly.

Sirius looked around to make sure no one else was around, and then whispered, “We went after another Horcrux.”

“Did you get it?” asked Harry as they continued walking.

“Not exactly,” he whispered, surprisingly smiling as he pulled a locket out of his pocket. “Look at this.” He handed it to Harry.

Harry looked at the ordinary locket with disappointment and opened it. He frowned as he and the girls silently read a note from R.A.B.

Hermione sighed. “That could be anyone, anywhere, and who’s to say he or she was successful?”

“It could be, but it isn’t,” said Sirius with a smirk. “I’d recognize that writing anywhere! R.A.B. is Regulus Arcturus Black, my brother! He became a Death Eater during the first war and tried to back out of it. He was killed for it. I’ll bet he stole this!” He really seemed proud of his brother while explaining this.

“That would certainly be reason to kill him,” whispered Ginny, “but what if he couldn’t destroy it? What if his killer found it?”

Sirius sighed. “While that is indeed a possibility, I don’t believe it. I know that he went into hiding in Black Manor a week before he died. He was murdered in Knockturn Alley when he decided he needed some kind of information there. At least that’s what Narcissa told me.”

“So you think that he stole the locket and hid it at the manor, and then didn’t know how to destroy it. He went out looking for instructions?” Sirius nodded. “Wouldn’t he have taken it with him?”

"I don't think so. I don't think he'd risk that even if he wanted to risk his life. He did not want there to be any chance of Voldemort getting it back."

"I suppose that makes sense," whispered Harry. "Are you going to search the manor tomorrow?"

"Yes," he said before opening the door to Madam Pomfrey's territory.

"Oh my word!" she exclaimed at the sight of Dumbledore being levitated into a bed. "What happened?"

"I believe he's been poisoned," said Sirius. "We were having dinner at a restaurant and he collapsed. I think a disillusioned Death Eater must have put something in his drink."

"Very well," she said, already performing a diagnostic spell on the old man. "Definitely a dark potion." She turned to the three children. "Are you feeling alright, Mr. Potter?" He nodded. "Miss Granger?" She nodded. "Miss Weasley?" she also nodded. "Then I think it's time that you went back to Gryffindor tower. It's already curfew. I'll write you three a note in case you're caught, but I expect you to go straight to your dorm."

"Yes, ma'am," they said together and turned around.

"Good night, Sirius," said Harry.

"Night, cub."

Just as they opened the door, Albus, who'd apparently woken up, started screaming, "No more! Make it stop!"

They paused for a moment before feeling a spell gently push them the rest of the way out the door, which was silenced as soon as it closed, judging by the way all sounds from the room ceased suddenly.

"I can't believe how easily Sirius lied," commented Hermione when they were halfway to the tower.

"He couldn't exactly have told the truth, could he?" asked Harry.

“And this way, she knows he was poisoned,” added Ginny.

-

The next morning, Sirius was sitting at the staff table with Remus when Harry and his friends showed up for breakfast.

“What’s Sirius doing here?” asked Ron.

“He showed up last night while we were patrolling,” said Hermione.

“Oh, yeah. That was your night. Neville, Parvati and I have it tomorrow night. Why’d he come?”

“He brought Dumbledore here,” said Harry. “He’d been poisoned while having dinner with Sirius.” He hated lying to Ron, but the fact was that Ron didn’t know occlumency and couldn’t be told Voldemort-related secrets like the Horcruxes. “I’m gonna find out how the headmaster’s doing.”

He walked straight up to his godfather. “Good morning, Sirius.”

“Good morning. Before you ask, Dumbledore is recovering, but was up most of the night. Madam Pomfrey isn’t allowing him any visitors until tomorrow.”

“But...”

“She does expect him to fully recover.”

“So,” said Harry, carefully wording his question, “are you still planning your adventure today?”

“Yes,” said Sirius, “a task I am not looking forward to.”

“I’m going with him,” said Moony, lowering his voice. “He told me we’re looking for a locket, but not why – only that it’s important to the war.”

“Yes,” said Sirius, “but before we leave, there’s something I want to talk to Harry about privately after breakfast.”

"Sure," said Harry, thinking it had something to do with the Horcrux.

-

A half-hour later, Sirius and Harry were alone in Lupin's office. Padfoot was pacing nervously.

"What is it, Sirius?"

"Er, well, um, I know you've joked about..."

Thoroughly confused, the Boy-Who-Lived asked, "Just tell me whatever it is."

"I'mthknaskngAnglmryme," he eloquently stated.

"What?"

Sirius took a deep breath. "I'm thinking of asking Angela to marry me."

A huge grin formed on Harry's face. "That's great! I'd wondered about you two when she wasn't at the Manor for the holidays, but never asked."

"She was there for Christmas, but had to leave to spend time with her family before you woke up. She did leave you a present."

"I knew you hadn't broken up, but I wondered how you two were...progressing."

"Anyway," said Sirius, "I wanted to make sure you wouldn't have any problem with it."

"None at all."

"Great. Don't tell anyone, but I'm gonna ask her on Valentine's Day."

-

Harry spent the rest of the day happy, and couldn't tell anyone why that was. He was smiling through Quidditch practice, the defense club,

and his exercises. He was even smiling when he did his homework. When Hermione asked him why he was so happy, he'd just say, "It's a beautiful day."

The next day, Harry received an owl from Sirius with a note that said, "*I found it.*" Harry showed it to the girls, letting them know that Slytherin's locket had been located. Before classes began, they visited Dumbledore, who was awake and seemed reasonably healthy. They told him about Sirius' success, to which he replied, "Excellent news. Three down. Three to go."

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## Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 28 – Pursuing Goals

Valentine's Day was an interesting challenge for Harry. It was his first one with a girlfriend. The previous year, he'd completely ignored it since he was adamantly stating that he wasn't dating either Hermione or Ginny. Now, he was dating Hermione, so he had to do something. Voldemort had ruined the idea of a Hogsmeade date, since his last attack resulted in those visits being cancelled.

Harry chuckled slightly to himself as he realized that the Hogsmeade weekends were one of the main reasons he chose Hermione for his girlfriend. If he were honest with himself, though, he'd say that those were his excuses to pick her over Ginny. He had absolutely nothing against his redheaded friend, but somehow felt closer to the brunette girl who had become his brains and conscience. When he needed advice, he always went to Hermione first. He trusted her more than anybody else and deeply cared for her. He didn't know whether he loved her or just fancied her a lot, but he knew that being with her made him happy, even when she was lecturing him. He determined to show his girlfriend how much she meant to him.

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Hermione opened her eyes to find herself in her bed in Gryffindor Tower. She felt that something wasn't quite right, so she glanced around until she noticed something on top of her. She grinned as she pulled one of her hands out from under her blanket to pick up the bouquet of a dozen red roses that was on her bed with a small note. It read:

*Happy Valentine's Day!*

*I just wanted to say thank you for being my girlfriend. You mean a lot to me. I could never list how many times you've helped me, but more than that – you've been my closest companion, and I'm the luckiest bloke in the world for dating you. Would you have dinner with me tonight someplace special? (Don't worry. I've cleared it with Dumbledore.)*

*Yours truly,*

*Harry Potter – The Boyfriend-of-Hermione-Granger (My most important title!)*

*P.S. I hope you like the flowers. I had Dobby drop them off. I hope you don't mind.*

She grinned as she brought the flowers up to her nose to sniff them, and then pulled her bed curtains back. Lavender and Parvati were already up and getting dressed and Hermione noticed a clear vase on her nightstand that wasn't there the night before. It had a note under it that she quickly pulled out to see it was also in her boyfriend's messy handwriting.

*Hermione,*

*This vase has some runes on it that are supposed to keep whatever flowers are in it alive without having to water them. I hope you like it.*

*Happy Valentine's Day!*

*Harry*

She was positively glowing as she placed the roses inside the vase that she now noticed had runes carved into it. She made a mental note to look them up later as she placed her roses in it.

"Did Harry send you those?" asked Lavender from behind Hermione. "When did he give them to you?"

"Yes," she said, turning around. "He had Dobby, his house elf, bring them here."

"You are soooo lucky!" declared Parvati.

"I know," Hermione agreed.

"To date someone with a house elf," finished Miss Patil. "Harry must be loaded. He's got Fame and Money!"

Harry's girlfriend frowned. She considered herself lucky to have a thoughtful, romantic boyfriend who was faithful, honest, brave, and



many other good things. Rich and famous was not on her list of the Boy-Who-Lived's good qualities. Those were extra things that didn't matter to him or to her. Truthfully, more often than not, famous would be a negative quality that she had to put up with – not a good thing. In any case, Harry's good qualities far outweighed his bad ones, and most importantly, she knew that he cared about her. She decided not to comment on Parvati's observation, and instead got her clothes and headed for the shower.

-

Harry was sitting in the common room looking at the girls' staircase, when two of the three third-year females came down the steps. Unfortunately for him, neither was the girl he was waiting for.

"Good morning, Harry," said Lavender. "Hermione will be down in a few minutes. I saw the flowers you gave her."

Harry slightly blushed. "Er, I hope she liked them," he said as he studied his shoelaces.

"She did," said Parvati.

At that moment, Harry looked up as he heard footsteps on the girls' staircase. He rose up from his chair as a radiant smile formed on his lips. He stepped past the two girls he was talking to as he made his way toward his girlfriend. He took her hand and kissed it like he'd seen done in a few movies. She blushed just before he said, "Happy Valentine's Day."

"Thank you," said Hermione, "and thank you for the flowers. That was very sweet." She put her arms around his neck and gave him a brief kiss. "Happy Valentine's Day." She then took his hand and led him briskly out the door.

"Someone's about to get snogged senseless," said Parvati, looking at the now closed entrance.

"I guess so," said Ginny, who'd just stepped on the stairs in time to see her two best friends take off. She had a forced smile on her face as she continued down the stairway.

“Er, Ginny?” said a voice from nearby. She turned and saw that Neville was standing there, looking nervous. His ears were pink. He had an envelope in one hand, and a single rose in another.

“Hello, Neville,” she said with a neutral expression.

“Er,” he fidgeted nervously, “Could we talk in a private corner?”

“Alright.” She turned and walked away from the center of the room, and could hear his footsteps behind her.

“Er, Happy Valentine’s Day,” he said with a red face, holding both the flower and card up to her.

“Thank you, Neville,” she said as she slightly blushed. She took the card from his hand first and opened the envelope.

*Dear Ginny,*

*Happy Valentine’s Day.*

*I know you’re really pretty and nice and probably already have a date, but if you don’t, would you have dinner with me tonight? I met a Hogwarts elf who said she can bring us dinner anywhere we like a few days ago.*

*Neville*

She looked up from the note with a small smile forming on her lips. She took the rose from him. “I’d love to. Happy Valentine’s Day. If you’ll wait for me to put the flower away, we’ll walk to breakfast together.”

-

Since Lavender and Parvati both had seen Neville with Ginny, the entire school knew about it ten minutes later. Harry and Hermione were sitting at Gryffindor table, looking a bit more disheveled than they had when they left the common room when they overheard whispers about their friends.

“Do you think it’s true?” asked Hermione.

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” said Harry with a grin. “I’ve seen how Neville’s been looking at Ginny lately.”

“I hope so,” said Hermione. She didn’t have to mention how Ginny had seemed a bit depressed since they started dating, even though she did her best to hide it. She had accepted it, but they could tell that their best friend was a bit sad.

“Me, too.”

They both were happy to see Ginny and Neville enter the Great Hall, walking side by side. They sat across from Harry and Hermione, who decided not to mention the rumor.

-

At 7:05 p.m., Harry and Hermione arrived by portkey at one of his houses that they’d only visited once. To avoid falling, they both grabbed each other. While still in that position, their eyes locked and they started kissing until they were startled by a small ‘pop’ behind them. They separated and turned, grabbing their wands, only to be greeted by...

“Dobby is honored to be helping the Great Harry Potter and his Valentine!” he said enthusiastically. “Dobby is making everything ready on the patio like Harry Potter is saying!”

Hermione looked confused. “Wouldn’t that be a bit chilly?”

“Dobby is putting a warming charm around the patio. Dobby is also putting a ward against bugs as well.”

“Thanks, Dobby, for everything. You can go now.”

After Dobby popped away, Harry took Hermione’s arm and escorted her to the patio, where a small table was set for two. Next to Hermione’s plate, which she happily noted was filled with her favorites, she saw a small box that had been wrapped like a present. Grinning ear to ear, she put a hand in her purse and pulled out a

neatly wrapped package. After handing it unceremoniously to her boyfriend, she grabbed the gift off the table before even sitting down. "I've got to see what else you got me," she said as she happily ripped open the package from Harry.

He grinned as he opened the package Hermione had given him, and was pleased to see that it wasn't a book. It was a bottle of very expensive cologne. He looked up at his girlfriend, to see that she was now examining the gold earrings with a ruby heart on each of them that he gave her. They also had a note that they protected the wearer from minor curses.

She looked up at him with a sincere smile on her face. "Thank you." She then glanced at his gift. "That's my favorite cologne. It really..." she then blushed. "Let's just say that while you're wearing it, the odds of my pulling you into a broom closet will dramatically increase."

"I see," said Harry with a smirk. "I'll keep that in mind." He stared at the label, giving Hermione the impression that he was committing the brand into memory. "Have a seat." He pulled out a chair for her, and she sat down after thanking him.

-

At the same time, Neville had just presented Ginny with a box of Honeydukes' finest chocolates. They were in a room with comfortable furniture. Neither one knew it, but this room had formerly hosted the Mirror of Erised. An elf had conjured a table for them, and brought them their food earlier. They'd just finished dessert.

"I, er, wasn't sure what you'd like," said Neville, "but I'd like to learn," he added quickly. "I figured you can't go wrong with chocolates."

"You did good, Neville. Thank you." She grinned at him. "Relax, I won't hex you unless you give me a reason."

Neville gulped. "Er, what would be a reason?"

"Nothing I think you'd do," she replied.

"W-would asking you to be my girlfriend be a reason?"

“No.”

His face fell. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have...”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t be your girlfriend. I said that asking me wouldn’t be a reason to hex you.”

A flicker of hope shone in Neville’s eyes. “Oh. So, would you?”

She looked at the boy in front of her, and could see nothing in his eyes but affection for her. He hadn’t once tried to ‘make a move,’ so she knew that he wasn’t trying to get whatever he could from her. She knew she could trust him, and if she were honest with herself, she did like him. He wasn’t Harry Potter, but then, nobody was, and she knew that he and Hermione had something special together. Ginny decided that it was time to give up her fantasy of dating the ‘Boy-Who-Lived.’ “Yes, Neville. I believe I will.” She then leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. She did like Neville, but wanted to get to know him a bit better before she kissed him on the lips.

-

At the same time, Sirius Black and Angela Harper had just finished their meal at Potter Manor and were still sitting at the antique wooden table. Angela had noticed her boyfriend had seemed distracted all night, and wondered what was wrong.

“Sirius,” she said, “you’ve seemed very preoccupied, tonight. Is something the matter?”

“No,” Padfoot replied. “I’ve just been...thinking.”

“About what?” she asked, concerned.

Realizing that it was now or never, Black got up from the table and casually put his hands in his pockets. “I’ve been thinking about us – our relationship.”

A look of hurt appeared on Angela’s face. “You’re not thinking of breaking up, are you?”

He gazed at her in surprise for a moment, before responding. "No. Not that, at all." He took a deep breath. "I've been thinking about how much I've grown to love you, all over again, since we got back together. I know I did this before, thirteen years ago, but I'm still nervous." A look of understanding and love came on Angela's face as Sirius got down with one knee on the navy blue carpet and pulled a small jewelry box out of his right pocket. "Will you marry me?"

Without saying a word, she leaned down and began kissing him deeply.

-

The semester went by quickly after that, with Harry congratulating Neville and Ginny on getting together, and Sirius and Angela on getting engaged (he received an owl the next morning). They planned on marrying during the summer, and Sirius surprised Harry by asking him to be his best man. Padfoot explained that both he and Remus would be his best men, since he couldn't choose between them.

Voldemort's attacks lessened after his defeat at the Hogwarts Express, and the Order believed him to be recruiting replacements for his lost followers. Dumbledore assured Harry that he was trying to ascertain other places that Riddle may have hidden Horcruxes, but thus far was coming up empty. As June approached, Harry, Hermione, and Ginny asked if they could speak to him.

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"Come in and sit down," said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes. "Would you care for a lemon drop?"

After politely refusing, Harry began nervously. "Er, well, sir, as you know, we've been working hard on our defense for about two years."

"And an admirable job you've been doing of it." He shifted his gaze toward the girls. "All of you."

"Thank you, Professor," said Hermione timidly. She cleared her throat. "We were wondering if we could attempt our Defense O.W.L.s this year with the fifth years." The other two kids nodded.

Albus looked slightly surprised. "I must admit that I expected this next year, not this year. Based off of what Professors Flitwick and Lupin have told me, you have a good chance of success, especially if you've been studying for the theory portion of your exams."

"We have," assured Ginny.

"Are you certain that you wish to expose your abilities this way? O.W.L. scores are a matter of public record that anyone can find out."

"I figured that it's no secret that we're good at defense," said Harry. "It might raise Voldemort's eyebrows if I do well, but it won't give away any big secrets. He'll be more surprised that we were able to take the tests early than anything else. We won't expose our elemental abilities or my Metamorphmagus talent."

Hermione added, "I don't think it's wise to waste our time in the normal defense classes. We're not learning anything new, and the hours spent in the classroom and doing homework could be put to better use."

The headmaster smiled. "I can see that you've made up your mind. Before I contact the proper authorities, I'd like to personally test you. There will be nothing official about this test. They will let me know whether you're ready or not, and let you know what needs work." He pulled out his wand and summoned a book. Harry noticed its title, '*Ministry of Magic O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. Requirements.*' He flipped through it to find the appropriate page. Harry was able to glance at it for a moment before being asked to stand up. What he saw appeared to be a list of spells that they needed to know.

Individually, Dumbledore tested each of their shields, occasionally making notes that Harry couldn't see. He then had each one shoot different spells at him. He then conjured three roles of parchment and gave one to each of them, along with a quill and ink. Harry saw that it was an essay test where he was required to write a paragraph or more about each of the spells they'd just demonstrated, as well as a few more.

After the last of them (Hermione – who had apparently written a novel about each of them) handed theirs in, Dumbledore said, "Thank you."

I will look over these tonight, and tomorrow morning, each of you will receive my evaluation in the mail. It will say whether I'm allowing you to take the exam, and if I am, what areas require more studying on your part. Good evening."

They got up and left, wishing the headmaster a good night. They talked about how they thought they did, and Hermione commented, "He had to test us, because he'll be putting his reputation on the line. If he says we can take the test and we fail, he'll look bad. I do hope I did alright. I think that I may have made a mistake when I..."

Harry smiled as his girlfriend started going over the exam, knowing that this was a part of her – a trait that would never change. As promised, the next day they received their results by owl during breakfast. Harry unrolled the scroll he received.

*Harry,*

*I must say that I was quite impressed with your essay test. I was aware that you excelled in the actual spell-casting, but you also demonstrated a remarkable grasp of the theory behind the magic. Consequently, I am recommending that you are allowed to take the Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. with the fifth years.*

*Please remember that this will not be an easy test, and some of your classmates will be jealous. The areas that I recommend you concentrate your studies on are..."*

Dumbledore went on to tell Harry what his problem areas were. Harry grinned ear to ear when he read the bottom of the note.

*P.S. During your exam, I noted that your magical power has grown to a point that you no longer need to spend six weeks with the Dursleys to restore the wards at Number Four Privet Drive. Two weeks per year should be all that is required to renew your protection. I will inform Sirius and the Dursleys about this before you leave Hogwarts this year.*

He then exchanged letters with the girls. Each of them was allowed to take the exams, and Harry noted that the headmaster began each note with a compliment. He also noticed that Ginny had more



recommendations that he and Hermione had to study, but chose not to comment on it. Both girls expressed their congratulations about him not having to spend as much time at his hated relatives' house.

-

They decided not to tell anyone (except their closest friends) about their O.W.L.s until it was absolutely necessary. They took their normal end of year exams with their classmates, and the next week, showed up with the fifth years for their D.A.D.A. exam after Neville had kissed Ginny for good luck.

"Harry,"

"Ginny,"

"Hermione,"

"What are you..."

"Doing here?" asked Fred and George when they noticed the trio in line with them. Harry noticed that now others were looking at them as well.

Hermione, whose ears were turning pink, answered, "We've been given permission to take this test, so that's what we're doing."

"Wow," said Fred and George together.

"I hope you don't do..."

"that much better than us,"

"or Mum will have a fit at us,"

"while congratulating Ginny."

The trio noticed that some of the students were now glaring at them, but Hermione advised them (as well as herself) to, "Ignore them."

When Harry was called in to take the exam, the instructor didn't seem too happy to see him.

“I suppose that you believe being the ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ entitles you to special privileges like this?”

“No, sir,” said Harry calmly. “I’ve worked very hard in this subject – both with the dueling club and independent studies – and that is the reason I’m here. I also believe that anybody who’s worked as hard as I have should be given the opportunity to take an exam earlier. That’s why two of my friends are also taking their Defense exam. They’ve been studying with me for the past two years.”

The examiner seemed to be satisfied with that explanation, but wasn’t easy on Harry. However, the ‘chosen one’ was ready for everything the man threw at him.

At the end of the exam, he said, “I understand that you and Professor Lupin taught the dueling club how to perform the Patronus charm out of concern about Dementor attacks.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Harry.

“Then for extra credit, let’s see yours.”

Thinking of the last time he’d kissed Hermione, Harry shouted, “Expecto Patronum!” causing a large, silver stag to burst forth from his wand and gallop around the room.

The instructor finally smiled at Harry. “Excellent work, Mr. Potter. I’m not allowed to tell you your score, but I suspect we’ll be seeing you again next year for your N.E.W.T. Dumbledore certainly was right about your abilities.”

Harry walked away from that exam feeling exhilarated, and finally truly understood the feeling Hermione got from acing an exam.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 29 – The Summer of Hell**

The next morning, Harry arrived in the Gryffindor common room in a very good mood. After he'd explained how exhilarated he'd felt after acing the Defense O.W.L., Hermione had pulled him into a broom closet to show him how happy she was with him, leaving Ginny to find Neville and snog him.

He found Hermione was already waiting for him, and decided to be more charming than usual, in hopes of getting another session with her in a broom closet. Besides, he really did think she was wonderful, and thought that it was only right to let her know that he did every now and then. She walked up and gave him a quick kiss. "Good morning."

He grinned at her. "It is now."

She blushed slightly. "Ginny and Neville have already left for breakfast. You've overslept a bit."

"Well," Harry said, "I had a hard time going to sleep. I kept thinking about how beautiful your smile was yesterday after the test."

"Sure you were," she said, though her ears were pink.

"Obviously, you don't know how beautiful your smile is," he said confidently. Then, sounding a bit nervous while blushing slightly, he added, "When you're smiling, it's like your whole face starts to glow, and your eyes sparkle even brighter than usual..."

"Are you trying to get another kiss," she asked as her whole face turned red.

"No. I'm just telling the truth. Last night I was thinking about how exceptionally beautiful you are."

"And did those thoughts turn into...dreams?" she asked suggestively. She then winked, causing his face to turn Gryffindor red as he began to study his shoes closely.

She laughed as he managed to say, "I, er, will never confirm nor deny that allegation."

"Come on. We've got to hurry if we want to make breakfast." She grabbed his hand as she continued to laugh at his embarrassment.

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When they reached the Great Hall, they saw that most of the students were almost finished with the meal, but were still sitting down. They found Ron, Ginny and Neville sitting in the middle of Gryffindor table and joined them. Harry looked at both of their frowning faces and asked, "What's wrong?"

The couple exchanged a look, and Ginny turned to Harry and Hermione, speaking in a low voice, "Last night at about nine o'clock, Lavender wanted to talk to Professor Lupin about her grade. She went to his office and opened the door..."

"But it was a full moon," interjected Hermione with a concerned expression on her face. "Lavender wasn't in her bed last night. Was she...hurt?"

"No," said Ginny. "He forgot to lock his office, so when she opened the door, she saw him as a werewolf curled up. He'd taken wolfsbane, so he didn't attack or anything, but she ran out of there screaming, trying to find another teacher. She spent the night in the hospital wing with a dreamless sleep potion, but as soon as she got here, she started telling everyone about it, including that Dumbledore asked her not to tell."

"What?" asked Harry, shocked. "She's telling even though Dumbledore asked her not to."

"She never could keep a secret," commented Hermione angrily.

"Well, what do you expect?" asked Ron defensively. "How would you expect someone to react when they see a werewolf? She didn't know he was on wolfsbane."

"Sounds like you fancy her, Ron," said Ginny with a smirk.

“Lupin’s not here,” said Harry, looking toward the staff table.

“Yeah,” said Neville sadly, “He’s resigned.”

“What!?” exclaimed Harry.

“He has to,” said Hermione. “Most parents won’t want a werewolf teaching their children.”

“They didn’t mind a Death Eater doing it until Snape got sacked, did they?” hissed Harry.

“I doubt that people knew he was one,” said Hermione, “Except for the other Death Eaters’ children.”

“And they were happy he was here,” said Harry angrily. “They probably got a good laugh at Dumbledore for keeping him here every time he blatantly favored them.”

“I suppose even Professor Dumbledore can make mistakes.”

“I know,” said Harry, sighing. “He was just trying to give Snape a second chance, but I wouldn’t have bothered with that...”

“Harry,” interrupted Hermione.

“Person,” said Harry with a grin. “I was going to say person.”

“Naturally,” she said, not looking at all convinced.

“Anyway,” said Harry, “hopefully Moony will come to Potter Manor this summer.”

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On the afternoon before they were to leave on the Hogwarts Express, Harry found himself reaching out his hand to knock on Dumbledore’s office door. He’d received a note from him at breakfast requesting a meeting.

“Come in, Harry,” said Albus, as the door opened of its own accord.

Harry walked in, and was surprised to find that the usual twinkle in the Headmaster's eye wasn't there. "Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon. Sit down."

Harry complied. "You wanted to see me?"

The headmaster folded his hands on the desk and sighed. "Yes. I've had a rather interesting conversation with your Uncle. He claims that you impersonated him and bullied your cousin, Dudley, last summer."

Harry swallowed as the room's temperature seemed to rise. He felt beads of sweat begin to form on his forehead. "Really?" he managed as he unconsciously lowered himself a bit on his chair.

"He therefore told me that you were no longer welcome in his home."

Despite how uncomfortable he was feeling, Harry had to stop himself from grinning. "Oh. I won't be returning?"

"I managed to come up with an arrangement that will allow you to return, and I'll explain it later. Right now, I want to know if it's true. Did you bully your cousin?"

The thought of lying to the professor didn't occur to Harry as he felt himself slide further down the chair, trying to avoid those penetrating blue eyes that seemed to see straight to your soul. His collar was feeling awfully tight around his neck. Harry knew he had to answer. He cleared his throat and swallowed again. "Yeah," he whispered.

"Pardon? At my age, I believe my hearing may be diminishing. What did you say?"

"Yes, sir," Harry repeated in a normal tone of voice.

"Are you aware that such behavior toward muggles is not only unethical, but illegal, regardless of your age?"

Harry put his head down. "Y-yes, sir."

“And that such behavior earns a expulsion from Hogwarts and up to a six-month residency in Azkaban?”

Harry swallowed again. He didn't know what to say.

“Fortunately, the Dursleys haven't pressed charges against you, but I must impress upon you the seriousness of your bit of fun. That sort of behavior causes muggles to fear us, and is one of the reasons we have to stay hidden from the muggle world.”

Harry released the breath he didn't know he was holding. At least he wasn't going to jail. Dumbledore continued, looking a bit more sympathetic as he put a hand on Harry's shoulder. “I understand that they have done far worse than that to you, and it is only natural to seek revenge, but you must not give in to that impulse.”

“Yes, sir. I'm sorry.” Harry's curiosity got the better of him, and before he knew it, he blurted out, “How did they find out?”

Albus slightly grinned. “A few days after you left last year, Mr. Dursley walked out into the lawn while Dudley was mowing it, and the boy immediately started crying, saying he'd work faster if he wouldn't beat him. This, naturally, led Mr. and Mrs. Dursley to question the boy, and they came to the conclusion that you had impersonated your uncle.”

“Er, yeah I did.”

“May I ask how?” asked the headmaster, and Harry could see that he was genuinely curious. “As far as I know, you have only learned how to perform glamour charms to change your hair, eye, and skin color – not your size.”

Harry knew that his one ability that he kept secret from the Headmaster was about to be revealed. He decided to do it with style. He closed his eyes in concentration and grew his neck and arms longer while changing his face to look like Tonks (with electric-blue hair) and said, “Don't tell anyone else, but I'm a Metamorphmagus. I found out last summer.”

Harry saw the twinkle return to the old man's eyes as he smiled widely. "That's quite remarkable," he said, as though commenting on the weather.

"Thank you," said Harry. "Only a few people, like Tonks, who's helped me with that, know about it, and they're all under orders not to discuss it. I want that to be a surprise if I use it against Riddle."

"That's a very wise decision. I won't discuss that with anybody, either. Now," said Dumbledore, "we must discuss your living arrangements on Privet Drive for the first two weeks of summer. The Dursleys have been paid to allow you to stay in your room for fifteen days, during which time you will not be allowed to leave it. I have sealed the door so that they will be unable to disturb you, as well as placed a silencing charm so that no sound will pass between your room and the rest of the house."

While Harry had no objection to not having contact with the Dursleys, there were certain...necessities of life that required that he leave the room at least a few times every day. "Then how will I...er?"

"Your trunk will be in that room, and you will be staying in your trunk, which I believe contains a fully furnished apartment. Your house elf, Dobby, will be able to bring you meals."

"Oh," said Harry dumbly. "How did you know about that?"

His eyes twinkling madly, the headmaster replied mysteriously, "There are very few magical items that can be brought into this school without my knowledge."

"Wow," said Harry, genuinely impressed.

"Now, the Dursleys have also stipulated that they don't wish to see you at all, which means that they won't pick you up from Kings Cross station. I therefore have concluded that it would be best for all concerned if you simply leave directly from Hogwarts to your room, instead of taking the Express." He handed Harry an empty tootsie roll wrapper. "This portkey will take you directly to your room at precisely eight a.m. tomorrow morning. If you've no objection, I'll let Sirius know."



“Er, no,” said Harry, taking the wrapper from Dumbledore’s hand and stuffing it in his pocket. “I’ll, er, just have to say goodbye to everyone tonight.”

“Very well,” the aged professor said. “Another matter that I believe will interest you is that I have reviewed my memory of our adventure in the Chamber of Secrets.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Really? Why?”

“Something was bothering me – a detail that I couldn’t get out of my head. I’d distinctly heard a scream down there that didn’t belong to the basilisk.”

“A scream?” Harry repeated. “How could you hear anything but the rooster?”

Albus smiled. “Perhaps, on occasion, my hearing is better than other times. I have determined that the scream occurred when you killed the smaller snake.”

Harry looked at his mentor in confusion. “The snake that bit me? How? Snakes don’t scream.”

“But Horcruxes do, when destroyed,” answered Dumbledore. “It is my belief that Voldemort’s snake was a Horcrux, which reduces the number that we must search for to two. If you wish, you may review the memory and make your own conclusion.”

“Okay, as long as you don’t make me watch you cut the basilisk into pieces.”

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Dark curtains were covering the smallest bedroom at number four Privet Drive. A stack of broken toys from years before was lying in one corner. An old dresser, desk and bed were also present. Unlike the rest of this tidy house, this room was covered in dust, as though no one had stepped inside it for almost a year – which was almost true. A few days before, when the house’s occupants found out that their nephew would be arriving magically, Petunia had hastily put

proper curtains in place to make sure no one would see the freak arrive.

Suddenly the air was disturbed as a teenage boy appeared from out of nowhere. He was still holding onto a small piece of trash as he tumbled to the ground. Getting up, he muttered, "I hate portkeys," and did something very strange. He pulled out his black wallet and placed it on the floor, saying, "Expand," just before releasing it.

The wallet grew and reshaped itself within seconds into a large, black trunk. Harry opened the trunk to the sixth compartment, where he found a large staircase, and walked down into it, closing the lid behind him and setting the security features so that no one could disturb him. He said, "Hello," to Hedwig, who was on a perch in the living room, before picking up one of his schoolbooks and sitting on a burgundy recliner. It was going to be a long, boring, two weeks. '*Still,*' thought Harry, '*It's better than actually seeing the Dursleys.*'

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It was indeed a tedious and dull two weeks for Harry, with his only visitor being Dobby at mealtimes, when Harry insisted they dine together. Dobby also acted as mail carrier, since owls couldn't come or go from Harry's trunk, and he avoided leaving it as much as possible, with the exception of letting Hedwig out his bedroom window every night, and back inside at precisely eight a.m. Through letters from Ginny and Ron, Harry found out that Percy had gotten a position at the Ministry of Magic, and was writing reports about cauldron bottom thickness. He'd also complained that he'd have gotten five Galleons more per hour if he'd been Head Boy, and still blamed Harry for that. Within a week and a half, Harry had gotten through all his summer homework. It still amazed him how much school work he could get done if he weren't bothered with a million chores. He kept up his exercise, making sure he wouldn't lose his edge over Voldemort – the gasping ghoul. Although it was difficult without a partner, he practiced his defensive (and offensive) spells as much as possible on a dueling dummy. He was very happy when the two weeks were over.

The trunk opened up, and Harry walked up the steps and into his room. The previous night, he'd told Hedwig to fly to Potter Manor instead of back to Privet Drive when she was done hunting. He closed the trunk and grabbed the handle, saying, "Shrink," and quickly stuffed his wallet/trunk into his back pocket. He then used the portkey hanging around his neck by saying, "Activate Potter Manor."

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"Harry, you're here!" exclaimed a bushy-haired girl before enveloping her boyfriend in a back-breaking hug before he had time to fall. "I've missed you so much."

He returned the hug happily. "I missed you, too." He then pulled back a bit so he could see her face, and gave what he'd intended to be a quick kiss. The moment their lips met, however, he forgot what a quick kiss was. They hungrily began devouring each other's mouths until they were interrupted by someone clearing his throat, causing them to pull apart and blush as they realized they had an audience.

Sirius Black was standing between Angela Harper (holding her hand) and Remus Lupin. Tonks was on the other side of Moony. Ginny was there with Neville, Ron, Fred, George and Mrs. Weasley. They were all smiling brightly at the reunited couple. Padfoot said, "I was afraid you'd forgotten how to separate."

Surprising himself with his boldness, Harry answered with a smirk, "You'd forget that too if you were kissing Hermione."

She slapped his arm lightly as her face reddened even more than before. "Harry!" she said as she hid her face. Sirius wolf-whistled while the others laughed.

"Maybe she's taken lessons from my fiancé," suggested Padfoot while wagging his eyebrows, causing Angela to blush slightly. "Anyway, I thought we'd have a bit of a get-together, to celebrate your return home."

At that moment, Molly Weasley couldn't hold back anymore and engulfed Harry in a tight hug, followed by Ginny. Within minutes, the group was outside beginning a pick-up game of Quidditch with five on

five, and Molly acting as referee, “To make sure you lot don’t kill yourselves.”

The team captains were Sirius and Remus, and the teams they picked had three Chasers (Sirius, Harry and Angela vs. Ginny, Hermione and Tonks), a Keeper (Ron vs. Remus) and a Beater (Fred vs. George) respectively. They decided to play to two hundred points.

Angela immediately began showing that she hadn’t forgotten anything from her days as a professional Chaser as she got the Quaffle first and made a goal before Lupin knew what was happening. Ginny, however, gave her a run for her money and it soon became a competition of youth versus experience. Harry was impressed that Remus seemed to be as good a Keeper as Ron. The first couple times Harry got the Quaffle, Moony stopped him from making a goal, so he started simply passing it to Angela or Sirius (who wasn’t that bad, either, but had nothing on his fiancé). Harry got upset when Tonks grew out her arm to intercept a pass, knowing that he didn’t want to reveal his own similar powers, so he called her a cheater. Molly didn’t give her a penalty, but asked her not to do that again. In the end, due to Angela’s superior skill, Sirius and Harry’s team won, but only by twenty points.

They were having lunch outside under the pavilion near the swimming pool, when suddenly Hermione let out a small scream. Instantly, everyone was standing up with their wands pointed in the direction Hermione was indicating. There, relentlessly coming toward the group, were five handsome tawny owls, each of which was carrying a large square envelope.

In a terrified whisper, Hermione said, “One for each of us that took O.W.L.s.”

Harry let out a sigh of relief before turning to his girlfriend. “I thought the Death Eaters were attacking the way you screamed.”

She had the decency to blush and mutter, “Sorry.” The Ministry owls flew to Fred, George, Harry, Hermione, and Ginny, respectively.

Hermione’s hands were literally trembling as she held her envelope. “If you messed up, you can always take that O.W.L. again with the

rest of us in two years,” said Ron, earning a glare from Harry and Ginny. Hermione’s face was pale, and it appeared that she believed that’s what would happen.

“Only one way to find out,” said Harry as he opened his package with fumbling fingers. He read it over three times before breaking out into a wide grin. “I got an O! It says that I got the best defense score in ninety-seven years.”

“Wow. That would be when Professor Dumbledore took his O.W.L.s,” said Hermione, earning curious glances all around. “I read about him in *Which Wizard – Who’s Who in the Wizarding World*.”

“So, what did you get?” asked Harry, noticing that she hadn’t opened her envelope yet.

While Hermione was fumbling with her envelope, Ginny said, “I got an E,” with a slightly disappointed look on her face, “It also says I’m the youngest person ever to get a Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L.”

“That’s wonderful!” said Mrs. Weasley proudly, as she hugged her only daughter. She then said, “Fred, George, what did you get?” when she noticed them trying to stuff their letters into their pockets. “Accio!” she said, causing the envelopes to come straight into her hands. She looked each of them over as her face took on a look of disappointment and finally anger. “Three O.W.L.s each?! JUST WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING AT HOGWARTS ALL THIS TIME?”

“But they’re good subjects,” said Fred defensively, “and we got O’s in all three.”

“Potions, Transfiguration and Charms are difficult,” said Fred.

“And we should’ve gotten Exceeds Expectations just for showing up for the rest,” added George.

“SHOWING UP!? SHOWING UP!?” Mrs. Weasley took a deep breath, obviously trying to control her temper as her face got redder and redder. “As glad as I am you aced three exams, I would’ve expected that you’d have gotten at LEAST FOUR MORE O.W.L.s EACH! GINNY’S ALREADY GOTTEN ONE, AND SHE’S JUST ABOUT TO

START HER THIRD YEAR! T's IN EVERYTHING ELSE! IT'S AS IF YOU PURPOSELY FAILED THE EXAMS! I KNOW YOU'RE SMARTER THAN THAT..." On and on she rambled, chasing after the twins, who were running back to the house.

Harry turned back to Hermione, who was reading her exam results with a slightly disappointed look on her face. "How'd you do?" he asked his girlfriend.

"An O. That's all. No special records or anything. You did better than me."

"You're complaining about getting an O?" asked Ginny with a disgusted look on her face. "I suppose you think I failed and should retake it!"

"Oh, no," said Hermione worriedly. "I didn't mean that. I just, well hoped..."

"...that you'd do the best out of us?" said Harry gently. He then put his hands on her shoulders. "You did very well on the exam, better than most of the fifth-years. You should be proud." He turned to Ginny. "And so should you. I'll bet you did a lot better than most people, and you will go down in history."

"Exactly," said Sirius. "You three did great!"

"I'm impressed with all of you," said Angela.

"I agree," said Lupin. "You all were amazing! I'm proud that I was your Defense teacher, even if I can't continue. The question is whether you'll take the N.E.W.T. classes with the sixth years, or continue independent studies. You could also not bother with that subject until you're sixth-years."

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, "I haven't discussed it with these two yet, but I think I'd prefer independent study. We've done great with that before, and I think we'll get through the material faster that way. I'd like to try for my N.E.W.T. next year."

The girls each nodded their agreement. Harry then asked, "Remus, I know that Professor Flitwick will help us once we get back to Hogwarts, but do you think you could get us started in our Defense N.E.W.T. study now?"

The werewolf smiled brightly. "I'd love to."

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The summer passed quickly after that, with Harry, Hermione and Ginny spending their mornings training in Potter Manor. At least once per week, Neville and/or Ron would come by to practice dueling with them, but neither was trying to learn all the N.E.W.T. material early. Hermione had insisted that she inspect the homework Harry had done while in his confinement at Privet Drive, and was very pleased with his results. In other words, she didn't have to make that many corrections.

Like in the summer after their first year, Hermione's family went on their holiday to a place that had floo access so she could continue her studies every morning. When Harry's birthday came, she spent the whole day at Potter Manor, until the party ended at around ten p.m. Their regular Hogwarts letters arrived that day, but they decided not to go to Diagon Alley until after Hermione's family returned, which was the day before Sirius and Angela's wedding.

As that day was too busy with last-minute preparations, they planned on going shopping for school supplies the day after the wedding – the day before Ginny's thirteenth birthday. The Weasleys would be going with Hermione, Harry, Remus, Tonks, and a few other Order members. That was also the day that Angela announced that her boss, Ludo Bagman, had given her seven tickets for the Quidditch World Cup that would be used for her, Sirius, Harry, Remus, and the three Grangers. Arthur Weasley commented that Ludo had given him enough tickets for his family as well. Harry was a bit surprised that England was hosting the event, considering that Voldemort was still at large, but Minister Bones was determined not to let You-Know-Who control their lives. There would be extra security there, but they would go on with their lives – and that included watching Quidditch matches.

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On Saturday, August 9th, a small group of people, containing many Order members, Angela's family, and other friends, including Hermione's parents, gathered in the huge backyard of Potter Manor. When Harry looked at the decorations, he was glad that Dobby had insisted on handling them himself (with the help of a few Hogwarts elves Dumbledore had lent them). He knew he wouldn't have wanted to do the decorating.

Despite the blessed event, he knew that they were all worried. It had been awhile since Voldemort had done a major attack, and a wedding at Harry Potter's house might seem like a good opportunity. Harry hated how uncomfortable the dress robes he was wearing felt, and wondered if he'd be able to fight in them at all if there were an attack. He did have his wand ready, but hoped he wouldn't need it, especially considering how warded the property was.

Both he and Lupin were wearing matching outfits, since both of them were best men. He was holding Sirius' ring while Remus was holding Angela's. He was relieved that he wouldn't have to speak. As long as he didn't lose the ring, he'd be alright. It was then that he noticed one of the bridesmaids, a beautiful girl dressed in an amber robe, as she approached. Her brunette hair was fixed in a style he'd never seen it in before. He smiled at his girlfriend to silently communicate his approval of her appearance. Catching his expression, Hermione's ears turned a bit pink as she smiled back at him.

During the ceremony, Harry went between paying attention and looking at his girlfriend, and didn't notice a witch in the last isle pull out a mirror, hide it in a handkerchief, and whisper into it. No one else noticed, either, assuming that the woman was simply crying. Harry managed to give Sirius the ring after dropping it on the ground only once, much to the crowd's (and Hermione's) amusement.

After the ceremony, they had dinner under the pavilion, followed by dancing. Harry had paid for the band as a wedding gift. After Sirius and Angela started it out, Harry took his girlfriend onto the dance floor, and was followed by several other couples, including Neville and Ginny. Harry was surprised to see that Ron had brought Lavender



Brown as his date, and was amused to see Tonks dancing very closely with Remus. He also noticed that Percy, who'd been invited, wasn't there. Harry (and Hermione) found that he wasn't the most graceful dancer in the world, but he did manage to avoid stepping on her feet – mostly – during the first dance.

Hermione whispered, "Let me teach you how to dance. Calm down and pay attention."

Looking into her eyes and following her instructions, he managed to learn a basic waltz, and had one dance with the bride (while Hermione danced with the groom), another with Ginny (while Hermione danced with Neville) and another with Mrs. Granger (while Hermione danced with her father) before the party was over.

Hermione and her parents were among the last to leave. Sirius and Angela were spending a week at a different Potter property, at Harry's insistence, and had already left. Remus was staying at the house, and was in another room 'speaking' with Tonks.

"That was a very beautiful ceremony," said Mrs. Granger. "I wonder if I'll be watching you and Hermione in a similar..."

"MOTHER!" interrupted a red-faced Hermione while her boyfriend looked away.

Harry managed to clear his expression and say, "Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Granger. It's always good to see you."

"I already told you to call us Adam and Marissa," said Mrs. Granger, "and it was good to see you as well."

"Goodnight, Harry. I'll see you in the morning for class," said Hermione, before kissing him quickly.

"Goodnight."

The three Grangers stepped into the huge fireplace and Hermione threw down some floo powder, clearly saying, "Granger residence," and they disappeared into green flames.

Sighing, Harry turned around to make his way to his bedroom when Tonks and Remus, looking rather disheveled, entered the room, with Tonks tripping on a chair near the door.

“Wotcher, Harry. I’ve got to get back home. Got work early in the morning.”

He smiled at Sirius’ cousin. “Goodnight, Tonks.”

She walked toward the fireplace, but before she got there, it glowed green as three figures appeared. One of them ran straight up to Harry, who’d drawn his wand in surprise. She flung her arms around him and cried on his shoulder, “Oh, Harry! It was awful! Our house is in ruins!”

The moment Hermione’s arms were around him, he recognized his girlfriend. As he was putting his arms around her, he looked at his other guests to see they were her parents.

“We didn’t know where else to go,” continued Hermione, between sobs.

Adam Granger then spoke. “Harry, when we arrived, the house looked like an explosion had occurred inside it, but the fireplace was still intact. Hermione insisted that the Death Eaters that assumedly did it might be outside waiting for us, so she suggested we return here. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Of course not,” Harry said immediately. He then thought about the bedrooms, realizing that of the five bedrooms, one was his and one was Sirius,’ with Lupin using another. “There are two available bedrooms. Hermione can have one and you and Marissa can have another.” He thought of another problem. “We can get you some clothes tomorrow.”

Before the Grangers could respond, there was a knock at his door. He started walking toward it, but Dobby popped to it faster, opening it to reveal the Weasley family. Arthur, Molly, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny were there, and looked terrible. There was soot on their clothes, and worse than that, they all looked very sad. In fact, Mrs. Weasley and Ginny were crying.

Arthur walked up to Harry. Trying (and failing miserably) to sound cheerful, he said, "Hello, Harry. It, er, seems that every Order wedding guest had their house, er, destroyed during the ceremony – almost as if somebody told them who was at the wedding." He looked down. "When we got home, we found..."

"P-Percy," sobbed Molly as she put her arms around her husband and sobbed on his shoulder.

"Yes, um, Percy was hurt badly. It looks like he fought them. We found one dead from a Reducto. Percy wasn't hit with the killing curse, though. He's at St. Mungo's now. Er, they don't know if he'll live or die. They know for sure that he's lost his left leg." Harry could see that the Weasley patriarch wanted to cry and was fighting it. "We went to headquarters and found that house is already full of families." He looked down as though it hurt his pride. "I was wondering if you might..."

"Let you stay the night?" asked Harry. "Of course, but it might be a bit crowded. The Grangers' house was destroyed, too. Tomorrow, we'll look at the other houses I have and figure out a more convenient solution. Let's see. Ginny can stay in Hermione's room." His girlfriend nodded. "Ron can stay in mine. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley can have Sirius' bedroom. The twins..." he paused. "Do you mind if they stay with you, Remus?" The werewolf nodded his head. "I'm sure we'll all feel better with you keeping an eye on them. That way they can't blow anything up." There were a few small smiles at that pronouncement.

He then asked Dobby to conjure spare beds where needed while Tonks went home, which she soon notified them was untouched. Auror houses got special wards placed on them by the Ministry due to the nature of their work, so it would take more than your average Death Eater to attack her house successfully.

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As light poured into the master bedroom of Potter Manor, Harry began the slow process of waking up. He began to hear the familiar snores that only Ron Weasley could produce and remembered what had happened. He dragged himself out of bed, thankful that he hadn't needed glasses for about a year now, and pulled open a drawer in his

desk. He pulled out a parchment and closed the drawer, and then he put on a robe. He quietly made his way out of the bedroom.

He walked to the library, where he was pleasantly surprised to find he was not alone. "Good morning, Hermione," he said as he sat next to her on a sofa.

"Oh, good morning, Harry," she replied after slightly jumping in surprise. She'd nearly dropped the book she'd been reading. After kissing him, she said, "I'm surprised you're up this early."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I think I've been spoiled for the last month not hearing Ron's snoring." She giggled. "Anyway, I thought I'd look over my houses to figure out where the Weasleys can move to. I know Dobby's been keeping them all in order. Y'know, dusting them every week, that sort of thing." He then showed her the scroll he'd gotten from Gringotts. "My houses."

He unrolled it to see the list of all the houses he owned, starting with the one he was in. They looked through them all, including the one Narcissa and Draco Malfoy were occupying, and quickly went past the picture of the destroyed cottage in Godric's Hollow.

They were looking at a five-bedroom house at Portsmouth in Hampshire that was about the size of Potter Manor. Hermione exclaimed, "That's perfect! It's got enough bedrooms for everyone. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley obviously share a room, as do Fred and George. That leaves one each for Percy, Ron, and Ginny."

Harry smiled at his girlfriend and gave her a quick kiss. "Portsmouth it is, then."

-

About an hour later, the rest of the house had woken up. Both Harry and Hermione had showered and were dressed. Harry was in shorts and a t-shirt while Hermione had jeans and one of Harry's old Quidditch jerseys that had been in her wallet/trunk that she kept with her everywhere. It had been in her purse during the wedding. All the house's occupants sat at the table while Dobby served them breakfast. Since it was Sunday, Mr. Weasley didn't have to go to

work, although the Weasleys did plan on visiting Percy at the hospital later. Harry figured that now was the right time to discuss the family of redheads' living arrangements. He glanced at Hermione, who nodded as though she were reading his mind. He cleared his throat, getting everyone's attention.

"Well, er, remember last night I said we'd figure out a more convenient solution to the living space problem?" The Weasleys all nodded. "I think I've come up with an answer." He pulled out his wand. "Accio, Gringotts scroll." As the scroll came zooming toward them from the library, Harry continued, "I have the perfect house for you in Portsmouth. You can move in there today, if you like. It's got five bedrooms." He caught the scroll and showed Arthur the picture of the house. As Mr. Weasley was reading the description, Harry looked at the Grangers. "We'll also add all new clothes for you and the Weasleys to our planned shopping trip, so you don't have to keep transfiguring your clothes. We'll stop by a muggle clothes store on the way."

"Harry," said Mr. Weasley, "That's a generous offer to let us stay there, but we don't know when we'll be able to rebuild the Burrow."

"How much do you need?" asked Harry.

"No," said Molly, "We couldn't let you pay for that."

"Then stay at my house that currently isn't doing anybody any good for as long as you need it. I want to help."

Taking a deep breath while swallowing some of his pride, Arthur said, "Alright. Thank you. We'll visit Percy once we get school supplies. Then you and the Grangers can go clothes shopping."

"Mr. Weasley, you need clothes. Do you expect to wonder around the house starkers while what you're wearing is cleaned?"

"But we don't have the money for them," he admitted, "and I'm not letting you pay for everything."

"Then let me pay for it," said Ginny, thinking about the nearly fifty thousand Galleons she had in the vault Harry had given her about

two years before. "I still have most of the money I got when Lucius Malfoy and Cornelius Fudge were arrested."

"No, darling," said Molly, "That money is yours, and if you're wise, you'll keep it until after you graduate to spend on a nice house. I refuse to take it from you."

"Or invest it," said George.

"In a lucrative business," said Fred.

"Like we would," they said together.

Ginny looked at her brothers like they'd grown an extra nose. "Invest? You'd probably just use the money to blow something up."

"You wound us," said Fred, faking being hurt.

"To think, our only sister," said George.

"Would think we don't have business aspirations," said Fred.

"We want to open a joke shop," said George.

"Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes," they said together.

"YOU'LL DO NO SUCH THING!" yelled Molly, "so that had better be a joke."

In the mean time, Ginny was looking at them pensively. "Mum, you haven't approved of Bill's or Charlie's careers either, but they both make a good living," she said.

"A fine point," said Fred.

"Well said," agreed George.

"Stay out of this, Ginny-dear. It's not your concern," said Molly.

"Yes it is, actually," she said, "because at some point I'm going to choose a career, too. And quite honestly, you've disapproved of all our career choices so far."

"That's not true, dear," she interrupted.

"Unless it's working at the Ministry. I hate to break it to you, but government work isn't the only career out there."

"We'll continue this discussion later," said Arthur. "Right now we're figuring out how to get clothes."

"I'll buy them and you can consider it a loan if you'd like," said Harry, doing his best not to sound impatient. He wanted to say that Arthur's pride would have his family living on the street, but knew that wouldn't help. "The point is that you need clothes now, not in a month."

Giving in, Arthur said, "Thank you. We will pay you back."

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Mad-Eye Moody and (surprisingly) Sirius and Angela Black showed up at Potter Manor just before they were to leave on their shopping trip. Sirius explained, "We're still on our honeymoon, and won't be spending the night here, but neither one of us would like to spend all day worrying about you lot, so we decided to join you." His face took on a grim expression. "Mad-Eye told us what happened. We were very sorry to hear about it."

-

They made their trip to a muggle mall (with Mad-Eye hiding under an Invisibility cloak) where a nice saleswoman made a huge commission off of an entire wardrobe for the Weasleys and Grangers, as well as some new clothes for Remus, Sirius, Harry and Angela (at the new Mrs. Black's insistence). Mr. Weasley was keeping track of precisely how much money was spent on his family. With Mad-Eye still under his cloak, and Harry under his, they went on to Diagon Alley.

Harry only came out from under his cloak at Madam Malkin's so she could measure him for new robes, including dress robes, which the Hogwarts letters had specified they needed that year. When Molly suggested it, Harry politely refused to let them look for dress robes in the second-hand clothing shop, insisting that she consider them a gift. Ron seemed uncomfortable with this idea, but appeared to like the

robes that he ended up with. At a different shop, Harry whispered to Hermione to get the gift he'd picked out for Ginny's birthday.

Ginny was the only Weasley who didn't need all her school supplies replaced. Like Hermione, she'd been in the habit of taking her trunk (in wallet form) with her everywhere, and both the girls had had them in their purses at the wedding. Each had contained all their school stuff, including books (for which Hermione was especially grateful – she'd kept all her magic books in the trunk), old Hogwarts robes, and a few casual outfits. When Ginny made that announcement, she gave the impression that she'd bought it for herself to save any embarrassment from either Harry or her parents. Under those circumstances, not even her mother could say that the expensive trunk was anything but a wise investment.

Once the rest of the supplies were bought (Mrs. Weasley picked out a few cook books at Flourish and Blotts while they were there), Harry summoned Dobby to take the Weasleys' purchases to the house they would be staying at. Since they weren't friends with Percy, the non-Weasleys went back to their homes while the Weasleys went to St. Mungo's to visit their injured son, after Harry gave them a bit of cash so they could buy food, and a portkey necklace to the house he'd gotten Lupin to make. Harry wanted to keep his portkey so that he could visit them whenever he wanted, and Minister Bones had made it legal to create (or have someone else create) a portkey to your own home.

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The next morning, Errol surprised Harry by crashing into his window, waking him up at the crack of dawn. When he opened his window to let the Weasley family owl inside, he took the note that was attached. It was from Molly.

*"Dear Harry,*

*Thank you once more for letting us stay in this lovely house until the Burrow is rebuilt, and for all the generosity you've shown us. Your parents would be quite proud of you. As you can see, Errol somehow survived the attack on our home, and found us yesterday.*



*According to the Healers, Percy will survive, but they couldn't save his leg. When he's recovered enough, they'll be fitting him with an artificial replacement like Alastor has. I'm afraid that he somehow blames you for what happened. I tried to explain that it wasn't your fault, and if he hadn't been so stubborn to refuse to attend the wedding at your house he wouldn't have been hurt, but he wouldn't listen. He got rather upset when I mentioned that we're staying at a house that belongs to you, and said something about getting his own place once he left the hospital. Hopefully, he'll change his mind and see reason soon.*

*The reason I'm writing is that despite the circumstances, we are still holding Ginny's birthday party as planned at 2 o'clock – only at the house we're staying at instead of the Burrow. Although I'm quite proud that Errol has made it this far, I don't think he's up to making several deliveries in a day. Therefore, I'm asking you to inform everyone who was invited, especially that boy, Neville. Ginny seems to like him.*

*Love,*

*Molly Weasley"*

Harry chuckled at the way Mrs. Weasley referred to Ginny's boyfriend. Apparently, she wanted to pretend that Ginny only had a crush on Neville, as opposed to the fact that they were snogging at every opportunity. He shrugged his shoulders and walked to the room where Hedwig's perch was.

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At precisely 2 p.m., Harry and the rest of the inhabitants of Potter Manor, in addition to Neville Longbottom, arrived at the house in Portsmouth. Harry hadn't changed the security on the floo yet, so Neville wouldn't be able to use that method. Harry intended to rectify that while he was there. As it was, only a Potter could floo there without being sent back, but anyone could floo away. Ginny immediately ran to Neville, so Harry and Hermione decided to take a walk around the grounds.

They had been here once before, while they (along with Ginny) were inspecting all of Harry's houses, but it had been a long time. The grounds of this place included a nearby pond and (as Harry had noticed every Potter property contained) a Quidditch pitch.

When the couple returned, they found that a Quidditch game was about to begin. Harry gave Ginny his gift— a pair of Chaser gloves — just before the game, figuring that it's better to let her have them while they were playing than later. After that, they went swimming for an hour, and it was time to eat. Harry noticed that Mrs. Weasley was staring intently at everyone while they were stuffing their faces, especially while they were consuming the cake. He finally asked, "Mrs. Weasley, is there something wrong with the food? You keep watching us as though you expect someone to complain."

She looked like a deer caught in headlights as everyone turned their attention toward her. "Oh, no, dear. I just used a different recipe from a cookbook." She then looked at everyone. "Did you all like everything?" When they all nodded their assent, she announced, "That was probably the healthiest cake you've ever eaten."

Hermione said with a frown, "How. That didn't taste like sugar-free chocolate frosting. I know because we use that." She indicated her parents, who nodded in agreement.

With a grin, she said, "Because I conjured the unhealthy ingredients."

Hermione replied, "But conjured food is of...no nutritional value." She gasped before grinning broadly. "It flavors the food, and then disappears before it can do anything detrimental to our bodies. Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant!"

Mr. Granger commented, "You can have your cake and eat it, too," with a grin.

Ron interjected, "You mean I can eat all the cake I want, and won't get sick or fat?"

"Exactly," said Mrs. Weasley.

"You've got to teach me to conjure, mum," he said pleadingly. Everyone present laughed.

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The rest of the week went by quickly, and soon Sirius and Angela were back from their honeymoon. Almost a week after that, on August 22nd, was Percy's 18th birthday. By a lucky coincidence, he had been scheduled to be released from St. Mungo's on that day, so all the Weasleys, Bill and Charlie (who'd come for the upcoming Quidditch match) included, went to St. Mungo's, only to find that Percy had already left the hospital. He'd left a note behind with the receptionist. It said,

*"Dear Weasley family,*

*I have rented a flat and will not be joining you at Mr. Potter's house. I hope that I never find myself in such a state that I am dependant on someone else's generosity for survival.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mr. Percival Weasley"*

What had upset the family most was the prat's formality, writing to them like he barely knew them. However, most of them didn't have much time to dwell on that, as all of them were looking forward to attending the World Cup in just a few days.

Minister Bones had arranged for the muggle caretakers of the event's location to be on a cruise at the time (they thought they'd won a contest) so that they wouldn't have to worry about secrecy or obviating them. The temporary workers that had been hired to replace them were actually aurors disguised as muggles. There would naturally be a lot of security at an event like this. Harry was bringing his trunk, which had a three-bedroom apartment in it, to stay in. One room would be for Sirius and Angela, another for Hermione's parents (who were dressed in wizard robes to blend in), and another for himself and Neville (whose Gran allowed him to go after much persuasion – mainly because he'd be staying with *Harry Potter*). Hermione would be staying with Ginny and Mrs. Weasley in one of

the two tents the Weasleys brought. Since Percy had left the family, they didn't want to let his ticket go to waste, and Arthur had talked his wife into going, "To chaperone the girls."

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Soon after arriving by portkey, the kids walked off to mingle with everybody and explore the campsite. Harry was wearing the green dragon hide Irish National Quidditch team jacket Angela had given him a year ago for his thirteenth birthday. It had a small wizarding picture of a leprechaun on his heart and a large wizarding picture of the team flying out into a pitch on the back. The reason he could still wear the jacket is because it was charmed to adjust its size to the person wearing it. Harry was holding Hermione's hand; Neville was holding Ginny's hand; Ron was looking around for Lavender, who'd been there for a week since her family couldn't get good tickets. Ron told them that they were now dating.

"There you are," said Ron when they ran across the Brown family's tent.

The blonde airhead ran up to him, put her arms around him, said, "Won-Won!" and enthusiastically kissed him.

Harry looked at the others and mouthed Ron's nickname with a revolted expression. He whispered to his girlfriend, "If you start calling me 'Har-Har,' we're through."

She burst out laughing. "But now you've given me the idea..." she said with a smirk before he put his hand over her mouth. She pulled it away, getting no resistance from her boyfriend.

Ginny looked at her boyfriend, and with mock awe on her face exclaimed, "Oh, Nev-Nev!" before putting her arms around him in a melodramatic gesture.

"Oh, Gin-Gin," he said in response, and they both burst out laughing, which finally got the newest couple to break apart. Lavender glared at them while Ron studied the ground.

"I'm sorry if it amuses you that I *missed* my boyfriend. I haven't seen him in a *week*! Come on, Ron."

She dragged him off as he shouted, "I'll see you at the campsite."

"I wonder if he knows what he's getting into," said Hermione, once Ron and Lavender were out of earshot. Then a disgusted look appeared on her face. "Lavender always talks about her dates in the dorm. I think I'll throw up if she..."

"Gross!" said Ginny. "For once, I'm glad I'm a year behind you."

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They continued exploring, meeting Seamus' family. His mother was very complimentary of Harry's jacket, which clearly showed support for the Irish team that would be playing against Bulgaria. Their tent was covered with green shamrocks, as were several neighboring ones as well.

When they reached the portion of the campsite supporting Bulgaria, they saw pictures of one player, who Ginny identified as Viktor Krum, everywhere. "Looks like a grouchy git to me," commented Harry while examining the scowling face.

"Perhaps, but is quite good-looking," said Hermione absently, causing Harry to turn and look at her smirk before she started giggling with Ginny. "You should see the look on your face."

"So, do you think that git's handsome or not?" Harry demanded, suddenly feeling quite jealous.

"If I say no, you won't believe me, and if I say yes, you'll be angry," his girlfriend replied evenly. "Therefore, I see no reason to answer your question."

"Fine," he spat, causing Hermione to laugh out loud as she put her arms around him. "You're the only one I fancy," she said before kissing him rather passionately until Neville cleared his throat.

"I think we should be moving on," he said. "Why don't we look at what those venders are selling?"

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Fifteen minutes later, they were walking away from a vender. Each of them had a pair of Omnioculars. Neville was sporting a dancing shamrock hat, while the girls each had a green rosette. They all had programs as well.

Suddenly, there was an explosion nearby. Harry sensed rather than saw a green beam of light coming toward him. He instantly squatted down, pulling the others with him, so that the death curse soared above his head into a tree. Automatically, he pulled out his wand and turned to see a group of about twenty masked Death Eaters facing him.

"Reducto!" he shouted, relieving the closest one of his wand hand. With his peripheral vision, he saw the girls do the same thing while Neville managed to disarm one. He ducked another Avada Kedavra aimed at him.

"Crucio!" shouted another one, sending Neville to the ground writhing in pain. Harry turned to that Death Eater, intent on stopping her until he noticed that Ginny had just blasted off her hand, breaking the guilty wand in the process.

At that moment, a group of thirty witches and wizards appeared in between them and the Death Eaters with a loud pop. They were dressed in gold robes, and immediately began firing hex after hex at the attacking force. Harry took the moment to look around, and noticed that there were several small battles occurring all over the area, and the gold-clad figures were quickly turning the tide. Harry did keep alert, to make sure that none of them fell to a stray curse. He saw one Death Eater sneak up from behind to try to curse a member of what he realized was the Life Force that Minister Bones had created. He shot a, "Reducto!" that relieved the murderer of his life, decapitating him. Harry vomited at the sight. He felt Hermione's left hand on his back comforting him, but knew that her wand was in her right hand, and she was watching for anybody who would dare attack him now.

It was over within five minutes, and all the Death Eaters had either been killed, captured, or escaped. The Life Mark was shot into the air, depicting a lion eating a snake, as a sign of victory. As Harry and his friends made their way back toward the campsite, they heard the magically amplified voice of Amelia Bones.

*"This is Minister Bones. I am very sorry that this attack happened, and that any casualties occurred. Two deaths have been reported thus far, as well as about a dozen injuries. Forty-three of the cowards known as Death Eaters have been captured, and twenty-two were killed. This has been a victory against You-Know-Who."*

*"Among the injured was Michael Dimitrov, one of Bulgaria's Chasers. He will be replaced by one of their reserves – Amy Volitov – and the game will go on as scheduled. We will NOT let a terrorist rule our lives!"*

Harry was surprised to hear cheering after that statement, but then again, most of them hadn't just decapitated a man. He realized that he needed to pull himself together if he hoped to fulfill the prophecy by killing Voldemort, and so he decided to talk. "We need to find out if any of our people were hurt." He didn't even want to consider the possibility that anyone he knew had been killed. He picked up the pace, and felt Hermione grab his hand and match his steps. They heard Ginny and Neville, who seemed shaken up but alright, behind them.

When they reached the campsite, they found that everyone was fine. Hermione's parents had hidden in Harry's trunk during the attack, while the others helped fight the Death Eaters until the Life Force arrived. Sirius, Angela, and Molly all took turns hugging Harry (Molly had hugged Ginny first). Ron was already back, reporting that Lavender was alright. Fred and George, though, seemed more upset that their mum had stopped them from placing a bet with Ludo Bagman on the outcome of the match than that an attack had occurred. Ginny asked to talk to the twins privately.

The game was quite exciting to see. Harry sat next to Hermione, holding her hand. When Bulgaria's mascots, a group of veelas, had been introduced, Harry had been mesmerized until Hermione

squeezed his hand. He found himself on his feet, and wondered how he'd gotten there as he quickly sat down.

To Harry's surprise, the best Chaser Bulgaria had was Volitov, the reserve player. She actually managed to score four times, despite her teammate's blunders. The Irish Chasers, however, were superb, and worked together like a well-oiled machine. They scored seventeen goals, and it looked like they were going to win. However, Bulgaria's Seeker, Viktor Krum, managed to grab the Snitch, ending the match with Bulgaria winning 190 to 170. Despite his Irish jacket, Harry was on his feet cheering for Krum, who had clearly demonstrated the importance of a good Seeker. He noticed that Hermione was cheering next to him, and heard her comment that he was very brave when he'd caught the Snitch, despite having a broken nose, and felt a twinge of jealousy.

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They spent the night at the campsite, where, when Mr. and Mrs. Weasley weren't around, Angela informed the students that Hogwarts would be hosting an event called the Triwizard Tournament that year.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 30 – The Triwizard Tournament Begins**

“Can you believe that security?” complained Ginny as she sat down on the Hogwarts Express. “I thought they were going to have us strip-searched.” She turned her gaze out the window, where a bad storm was raging.

“Minister Bones just wants to make sure that there are no Death Eaters at Hogwarts this term,” said Hermione, “and I don’t blame her.”

“It did seem a bit excessive,” said Harry, “but with Voldemort out there we can’t be too careful.”

“I agree with checking everybody for the Dark Mark,” said Ron, “But to have Ministry people doing rounds instead of prefects seems a bit much.”

Neville looked at Ron like he’d grown a third eyebrow. “Don’t you remember last January when the Death Eaters stopped the train?”

“I suppose,” said Ron, who, unlike everyone else in the compartment, was still standing. “I’m gonna go find Lavender.” He then walked out the door, closing it behind him.

“I guess he wants a good snog,” said Ginny with a grin.

“I wonder how much security the people from the other schools will have to go through next month,” said Hermione thoughtfully.

“Probably a lot more than us since they’re foreign,” said Neville.

“I’m just surprised that we’re having the tournament at Hogwarts,” said Ginny. “Actually,” she added, “It’s a bit disappointing. Instead of watching seven Quidditch games, we only get to watch three events. And only one person from all of Hogwarts gets to participate instead of twenty-eight.”

“I hate the age restriction,” said Harry with a neutral expression.

“Well, then I’m glad for it,” said Hermione. “You’ve had enough adventures without getting involved in something like that.”

“But Hermione,” he argued, “This would be right up my alley, and for once, it wouldn’t involve Voldemort.”

“You’re too young,” she argued.

“But I did better at my O.W.L.s than anybody at the school. You can’t deny that.” She remained silent. “I think it would be fun.”

“Me, too,” said Ginny. Neville didn’t appear to agree, but wisely kept his mouth shut to avoid arguing with his girlfriend.

Harry, on the other hand, had a bit of a dreamy expression on his face. “I’d like to enter.”

“Harry! You can’t...” said Hermione, with a worried look on her face.

“If I can find a way to submit my name, I will,” he said firmly.

“You’ll do great,” said Ginny. “I’ll bet you win.”

“Harry, you can’t,” Hermione repeated. “It’s against the rules.”

Her boyfriend took a deep breath to calm down a bit. He looked her in the eyes. “Do you honestly believe that any seventh year at Hogwarts is better at defense than me?”

She looked uncomfortable. “Er, well...”

“And don’t you think that training for the tournament would be good for our independent study?”

“Um...” She seemed to be squirming in her chair. He put his hands on his girlfriend’s shoulders, without losing eye contact.

“If I manage to get in the tournament, will you be mad at me?”

She looked down, breaking eye contact as she seemed to be contemplating that question. After about five seconds, she answered softly. “I won’t be happy about it, but if you want to enter the

tournament that badly, I won't try to stop you, and I won't be mad. Just don't ask for my help to enter."

He smiled and gave her a quick kiss. "I wouldn't dream of asking you for help in rule-breaking. However, you will help me train if I do manage it, won't you?"

She smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Of course. Like you suggested, it would help us focus on our N.E.W.T. training this year. Besides, I do want the Hogwarts champion to win, no matter who it ends up being." She then put a hand on his cheek. "What's more, I'm glad you talked about it now rather than after you're chosen. I would've been furious if that happened."

He looked flabbergasted. "But I thought it was easier to gain forgiveness than permission."

"Not from me," she said with a smirk.

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"Y'know," commented Harry as he was riding on a thestral-drawn carriage in the heavy rain, "it really seems strange to not have anyone pestering us on the Hogwarts express. He looked at each of his companions – Hermione, Neville, Ginny and Luna, who they'd run into when they exited the train. Ron and Lavender were attached at the lips on the carriage in front of them.

"Yes it is," agreed Hermione. "I think that last January's incident eliminated everyone willing to show support to Voldemort. If anybody left is sympathetic to his cause, they know better than to get in a fight with you."

"Not to mention that the larquats have left the Hogwarts Express," added Luna.

Ignoring Luna's statement, Neville asked, "Will Potter's Army still be patrolling the halls?"

Harry looked thoughtful for a moment. "I don't think it'll be necessary with the aurors stationed at the school, but if trouble does break out, we'll start back up, but we'll get a new name."

"Why?" asked Hermione with a smirk. "I like the name."

"I don't," he replied.

"But you're the one who started it," said Ginny. "And you're our leader."

"And I say it needs a different name," Harry said triumphantly, just as the carriage stopped. They dismounted and walked toward the school.

Suddenly, two voices ahead of them called out in shock and anger, "Peeves!"

"You were already wet! Didn't do nothing," the poltergeist called out happily as he looked for another victim. He was holding a bag full of water balloons.

"What happened?" asked Hermione, causing Ron and Lavender to turn toward them. The right side of Ron's head and the left side of Lavender's was drenched and red. It was obvious that they'd been kissing and got hit with a water balloon where their faces met.

"He got us with one of those bloody water balloons. That's what," said Ron angrily. "He's a bloody menace!"

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As they made their way into the Great Hall, Harry noticed two things. First, it appeared that Dumbledore had re-hired Filch this year. He'd hoped that Mindy Weaver, who had replaced Filch after he'd been petrified and stayed on for the rest of the previous year, would have kept the job. Apparently, she didn't. Argus Filch was back, looking as venomous as ever, and had a cat that looked just like a younger version of Mrs. Norris. The other thing he noticed was a man sitting at the staff table that he'd met before. He noticed that he was very scarred up, and a piece of his nose was missing. However, the strangest thing about this man was that one of his eyes wasn't natural.

It was bigger than the other and electric blue in color, and it spun around crazily.

“Look who’s here,” said Harry, pointing at him.

“It’s rude to point,” Hermione said as they sat down at the Gryffindor table. “and I suspect that he’s the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher.”

“That eye of his always gives me the creeps,” said Ginny. “I’m glad we won’t have to go to his class.”

“Quiet,” said Neville. “It looks like the sorting’s about to begin.”

When Harry looked, he saw that Professor McGonagall had indeed placed the hat on a stool, and there were a bunch of nervous firsties staring at it. They looked soaking wet. The smallest of them looked completely drenched, and was wearing what appeared to be Hagrid’s moleskin overcoat. Harry wondered if the kid had fallen in the lake.

Colin Creevey looked like he was trying to get Harry’s attention before the hat began its song.

*“It’s time for the sorting*

*But first may I say*

*This year will be different*

*For he that will play*

*Whoever’s selected*

*May feel they’re alone*

*Yet among their housemates*

*This feeling is gone*

*If brave like a Gryffindor*

*He’ll beat every foe*

*Perhaps clever Ravenclaw*

*Will prevail, although*

*It may be that Hufflepuff*

*Works hardest to win*

*But a tricky Slytherin*

*Has more ambition*

*Four houses – one Hogwarts*

*We must all unite*

*Against all our enemies*

*Together we fight"*

"The hat must know about the Tournament," whispered Harry.

"It does stay in Dumbledore's office, so it's bound to overhear a few things," responded Hermione as names started being called.

It wasn't long until Harry realized why Colin had been trying to get his attention. The fifth person called was named Dennis Creevey. He turned out to be the one wearing Hagrid's coat. Now that Harry got a better look at him, he did look like a younger version of Colin, with the same mousy hair. He figured they had to be brothers. The hat announced that Dennis was a, "GRYFFINDOR!" When the boy got to their table, both of Harry's suspicions – him being Colin's brother and falling in the lake – were confirmed.

Once the sorting was finished, Dumbledore began the feast, during which Nearly Headless Nick informed them that Peeves had been causing trouble for the elves in the kitchens. Hermione, who knew that elves loved working, started berating the mischievous poltergeist for being so cruel.

"Now that we are all fed and watered, I'll like to introduce you to our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Moody," said

Dumbledore once the plates had disappeared. Harry noticed that the applause for the new teacher was minimal.

Dumbledore went on to announce the new items on Filch's list of forbidden objects, and then that the Triwizard Tournament was going to be held. Harry and his friends weren't surprised at this, nor at the announcement of the age restriction. However, neither Harry nor the Weasley twins had any intention of letting something as silly as a new rule stop them.

-

The next morning, when Harry arrived in the Common Room, he saw Hermione staring at the bulletin board with disgust. He walked up to it, and it didn't take long for him to discover what was upsetting her. The Weasley twins were offering jobs of product testers to kids.

"It's times like this I wish I were a prefect!" said Hermione, for the first time acknowledging her boyfriend's presence.

He sighed. "When you were a first-year, would you have volunteered to test their products?"

She turned quickly from the sign to face him. "Of course not, Harry. I was never..."

"That stupid?" Harry finished. "You see, Hermione. Any kid who takes that job has no excuse. They're all old enough to know better." She seemed to relax a bit and began walking with him toward a couch. "Besides, I don't think Fred and George would hurt any of them."

Hermione sighed. "I suppose not. I just wish the Weasley twins wouldn't..."

"What about my brothers?" asked Ginny, who'd just come downstairs.

"They've got an ad over there," Harry replied as he pointed.

Ginny quickly read it and smiled. "Oh, good. They're going to test our products before offering them for sale."

“Our products?” repeated a shocked-looking Hermione. Ginny’s face turned pale. “What do you mean, our products?”

“Er, well,” she said, looking down. “I, er, didn’t want to tell anyone right now, but I suppose I can tell you.” She looked up and leaned toward Harry and Hermione conspiratorially. She whispered, “I invested 1,000 Galleons in their business a week ago.”

“What?” exclaimed Hermione.

“Shhhh!” said Ginny.

Harry grinned at his friend. “Hmm. That sounds like a good idea. Too bad I didn’t think of it.”

“Harry!” whispered Hermione.

“Don’t worry,” he whispered back. “I think 1,000 Galleons is more than enough for them. I won’t give them more money.”

“Good,” said Hermione, who then turned to Ginny. “Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”

“Of course, Hermione. Making jokes is the only thing those two work hard at, and so I think they’ll make a fortune. Now they have to give me thirty percent,” she added with a large grin. “They’re planning on perfecting their products this year and determining what the average Hogwarts student wants in their joke shop. Once they’ve got enough products ready, they’ll place an order in the Daily Prophet. They figure they’ll be running the mail order store by January. They’ll become adults in April, so they’ll be able to get premises by the time the school year gets out. They plan to open up their shop on July first. I’m making sure they give me a copy of all their financial stuff so they can’t cheat me.”

-

The next few weeks went by quickly. Harry, Hermione and Ginny were working very hard on their N.E.W.T. Defense studying, especially because Harry intended to participate in the tournament. Professor Flitwick had agreed to tutor them all for one hour per week,



mainly to test their progress. Dumbledore had given them a syllabus that condensed the D.A.D.A. N.E.W.T. studies down to one year, and the Charms teacher who had once been a dueling champion would test them on what they were supposed to have learned. He had suggested requesting additional help from Professor Moody, but they were reluctant to do that. They were glad they hadn't consulted Moody when Neville told them that Mad-Eye had shown the fourth-year classes the three unforgivable curses, and mentioned that Harry was the only known survivor of the Killing Curse. Hermione was outraged.

"How could he?" she exclaimed.

"I'm glad we weren't there," said Harry. "I wouldn't want to watch him do that, even if it was to spiders."

"I'll bet Ron couldn't stand it," said Ginny, "with the way he feels about them." She then looked at her boyfriend, who was telling them about it, with concern. "Are you alright, Neville?"

Looking down nervously, he said, "Yeah. I'm fine."

"Good," said Ginny with a fake smile. She got up and took his arm. "Why don't we take a walk? We could use some alone time."

"Sure."

As the couple walked off, Harry thought that had been a very tactful way to get Neville alone to talk about his feelings from watching the cruciatus curse performed.

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A few days later, Mad-Eye did approach Harry and ask him to lead a dueling club like the one he'd assisted in for the past few years, after congratulating him on his O.W.L. score that he'd heard about. He'd be the staff sponsor, but would leave the running of the club to Harry's discretion. He happily agreed and started meetings the next week.

-

Before long, it was September 19th, Hermione's fifteenth birthday. Harry had arranged a private, romantic dinner for just the two of them, followed by a small surprise party in an unused classroom. Hermione made sure to show Harry just how much she appreciated it in a broom closet later that day.

That was also the day that the Daily Prophet reported that Igor Karkaroff, the former headmaster of Durmstrang that had disappeared right after You-Know-Who's return, was found dead with a Dark Mark over his body. The article further stated that he was a former Death Eater who'd turned in several Death Eaters after the first war had ended to get out of Azkaban.

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A few weeks later, Harry received a note from Professor Dumbledore during breakfast that said,

*Harry,*

*If it's convenient, would you meet with me in my office at eight o'clock this evening? You may bring Miss Granger and Miss Weasley as well.*

*Albus Dumbledore*

*P.S. I recently took a liking to the muggle candy bar known as Snickers.*

Therefore, the trio found themselves standing outside of the headmaster's office, having correctly used the password 'Snickers' to persuade the gargoyle to move.

"Come in. Come in," called Dumbledore's voice as the door opened of its own accord. "Good evening, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger and Miss Weasley."

"Good evening, sir," said Harry. The others wished him a pleasant night as well, and then the aged professor invited them to sit down.

"Would any of you like a lemon drop?" he offered.

"No thanks," said Harry and Hermione, while Ginny took one and popped one in her mouth.

"The reason why I called you three here is because I feel that you deserve the right to know that I believe that I've discovered the location of another Horcrux."

"Can we go with you to get it?" asked Harry before he could help himself.

Albus smiled at the trio, all of whom were eagerly awaiting his answer. "I don't believe that any of your parents," he turned to Harry, "or guardians will have any objection to my taking you on a small field trip to this location," he said, surprising all three of them. "Especially since they've escorted you to this location themselves many times."

Harry's eyes bulged out. "Where?"

-

Platform Nine and Three Quarters, although very busy six days per year, was deserted for the rest of the time. It had been over a month since any human set foot there. The sign was still there, as was the empty track.

Suddenly, the air was disturbed as four figures materialized, all of them holding onto a length of rope. Because of his frequent portkey use over the past few years, Harry managed to stay on his feet, as did the others.

Dumbledore pulled his wand out, and the others followed his example. "Now, I want you all to begin scanning everything here for dark magic. If you find any, let me know immediately and don't touch it."

As Harry began his scanning, he asked, "Professor, do you really think he would hide a Horcrux here where anyone could find it?"

"Could they, Harry?" the wizened old man asked. "It's been a long time since I've ridden the train, but back when I used to, this platform was crowded with people trying to board the Hogwarts Express. None of them were interested in searching for dark artifacts. The rest of the

year, it's completely abandoned, so he could have hidden it any time he wanted."

"I suppose," said Harry as he continued moving around, scanning the sidewalk.

"Ah hah," said Dumbledore. "I believe that I've found it." He was pointing his wand at the sign that said Hogwarts Express, yet didn't show any time of departure.

"You detected dark magic in the sign?" questioned Hermione.

"No," he calmly replied. "I detected no magic at all."

"Then how..."

"Yet I know for a fact that there is magic operating within the sign that tells it whenever the train will be arriving or leaving. You see, I made this sign."

Harry muttered, "You did," but was not heard because Hermione spoke more loudly.

"So the absence of a magical signature indicates that someone suppressed it, and the only reason to suppress it, is if you didn't want a magical object that didn't belong there to be detected," she said.

"Exactly," said Dumbledore while Harry worked out what his girlfriend had explained.

"So Tom didn't want a simple scan for threats to reveal his Horcrux," said Ginny.

"I would like you all to step back and put up your strongest shield while I attempt to dismantle the sign."

They did as they were told, and soon the front of the six-inch-thick sign was gone, revealing a small area upon which were carved runes that obviously controlled the sign's display. Lying down inside there was what appeared to be a large black feather. The old man looked closely and said, "Oh my. It looks like Ravenclaw's Quill," before a

strong wind pushed him back ten feet, causing him to fall swiftly toward the floor. The others felt a strong breeze coming from the sign, but were not knocked off their feet because they were far enough away.

Fortunately, Harry had enough presence of mind to cause the air element to stop the headmaster from injuring himself, and instead he was floating about a foot off the ground when a purple beam of light hit the spot where Albus would have landed. Harry moved him to a far corner and lowered him gently.

“Harry!”

He heard his girlfriend shout his name, so the Boy-Who-Lived turned in time to see a dark purple beam of light originating from the sign shooting straight at his gut. He dived to the ground, narrowly avoiding the curse, although he’d later discover a hole in his robes where the spell passed through. He noticed the girls moving around as well to avoid spells, so he used wind to move the sign so that the part shooting at them was facing the ground, where spells were still being shot at. Harry carefully moved the quill away from the sign, and then let both drop to the ground.

He turned to see that Hermione was already checking on the headmaster, who was conscious, though winded. In the meantime, Ginny was using her elemental ability to produce a fire more powerful than Fiendfyre, yet completely under her control. They all heard a loud scream as the quill/Horcrux was burned to ashes.

“Very good,” said Dumbledore, while breathing heavily. “I suppose that I’m not as young as I used to be. You should burn the sign, too. It would be too dangerous to attempt repair. It appears that I’ll have to build a new sign. Fortunately, I have a few months in which to do it.”

Harry then helped the headmaster up. Once all four of them were together, Harry levitated the rope to right in front of them, and they all grabbed it together for the return trip, after which Hermione insisted that Dumbledore see Madam Pomfrey, which he promised to do.

They found out the next day that the headmaster was none-the-worse for wear. After that, time seemed to go by swiftly, and so far there hadn't been any trouble in the school, so Potter's Army wasn't patrolling. Before long, it was October 30th, and the representatives of the two foreign schools had arrived. Everyone had been impressed with Beauxbatons' flying carriage as well as Durmstrang's ship.

The headmaster of Durmstrang was a man named Ludwig Chekov. He had short jet-black hair with a well-trimmed beard that was just beginning to gray. The Beauxbatons students were seated with the Ravenclaws while the Durmstrangs were at the Slytherin table. Ron had been excited that Krum had been among the visiting students, but Harry was a bit upset when he noticed Viktor looking at Hermione.

"Harry," said Hermione, who was sitting next to Harry at the feast. "Do you see that boy from Beauxbatons?"

"Who, Krum?" he said.

"No, not Krum," she said. "That one over there." She pointed at a tall boy with long blonde hair in a ponytail that was sitting at the Ravenclaw table with the other Beauxbatons students. He turned away quickly.

"What about him?"

"He was glaring at you a moment ago."

Before Harry could respond, he saw a French girl with silver blonde hair walk up to their table and ask Ron for some foreign food that was in front of him. He grinned when he saw the spaced out look on the redhead's face.

"Ron's in love," declared Ginny when the girl walked away. Ron turned red while the others laughed.

"I am not," he said while still hiding his face. "That girl is a Veela."

Dumbledore then explained that the Goblet of Fire would be the impartial judge, and that he would be drawing an age line around it to prevent younger students from submitting their names. Harry

overheard the Weasley twins talking about an aging potion, but figured that Dumbledore wouldn't be fooled by that.

"Are you still going to try and enter?" whispered Hermione.

He nodded his head as he muttered, "Yeah, if I can think of something."

"Well," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "I hope you're not successful, but I'll help you as much as I can if you are."

He turned to look her in the eyes. "Thanks. You're really amazing." He then kissed her for a few seconds. When they separated, he glanced at Krum to see him glaring back. Harry grinned and Viktor turned his head.

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That night, at around 3 a.m., using his invisibility cloak, Harry snuck down to the Great Hall holding a piece of muggle paper he'd pulled out of notebook in his trunk. He wasn't entirely convinced that parchment would work for what he had in mind. He wasn't sure precisely what to put on the paper, so he simply wrote '*Harry Potter – Hogwarts*' on it. He approached the age line and made sure that his feet didn't touch it.

He got his right arm out of the cloak (he didn't want to be identified if he was spotted out after curfew) and moved his hand into position to throw the paper that he'd folded into an airplane. He'd been practicing aiming it for hours. He threw it straight toward the blue flames of the goblet and watched it soar. It went right into the flame and continued soaring to the other side of the line, although it had caught fire. He quickly ran to it and stomped out the flame. He picked up the still-hot paper and unfolded it to see that his name was still intact, although the edges of the paper were burned so that it couldn't fly as a plane anymore. He had brought extra paper with him, but he didn't really want to let that sheet go to waste. He crumbled the paper into a ball and tossed it. It landed perfect in the goblet and Harry saw it burning as it got in. He released the breath he'd been holding and pumped his arm in victory.

“What do we have here?” came Mr. Filch’s voice. Harry quickly turned, to see the caretaker, along with his new cat, whom Harry had learned was named Mrs. Philips. He was glad that most of him was still under the cloak and quickly got his right arm inside and began moving quickly, but quietly.

“I know you’re in here, even if you’ve got an invisibility cloak. Go find the student that’s out of bed, my sweet.”

Harry didn’t waste time to look if the cat was on his trail as he raced out the door and to the nearest secret passage toward the Slytherin dormitory, not wanting to get Gryffindor into trouble. As he was running, he pulled out his wand. First, he cast a silencing spell on his shoes, and then he turned to see Mrs. Philips in hot pursuit. He stuck his wand out and stunned her. Then he silently ran off. He heard Filch scream in anger just before he was out of earshot. He waited until he was safely inside his common room before he laughed. He’d enjoyed hexing that cat!

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The next day, Harry slept a bit later than usual, but it was a Saturday, so it didn’t matter. His roommates had already left for breakfast, so he hurried up and changed so that he could eat something before the food was gone. He arrived at the Great Hall just in time to see the Weasley twins on the floor growing long, white beards. He looked at his girlfriend, who said, “Good morning, sleepy-head. Those two just tried using an aging potion.”

Harry laughed. “I knew that wouldn’t work.”

“It was rather dim-witted,” Hermione agreed. She then lowered her voice while Dumbledore was complimenting their beards. “Did you get your name in?”

He nodded with a neutral expression. His girlfriend gave him an appraising look. “Professor Dumbledore announced that someone assaulted Mrs. Philips last night. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?”

He chuckled and Hermione glared at him. “Harry!” she hissed.



After looking around to make sure no one was paying attention to him, he controlled himself enough to whisper, "All I did was stun her when she was chasing me."

"That's all?" she said with a smile. "The way Filch was acting, it seemed like you'd crucio'd her."

"So," asked Harry, still smiling, "Who else has entered the tournament?"

"Well, I saw Angelina Johnson, Cedric Diggory from Hufflepuff, a Slytherin 7th year I don't know, and everyone from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. There are still several hours before the Halloween Feast, not to mention anybody that snuck in here last night." She winked at him.

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The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Harry and Hermione spent most of the day studying for classes, and Harry was happy for the break when it was time for the Halloween feast. When they were done eating, Dumbledore gave a small speech, and then the goblet sent the first name out. Albus caught it and said, "The champion for Durmstrang will be Viktor Krum." Viktor shook Dumbledore's hand and left the room. When the next name came out, he said, "The champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour." She shook Albus' hand and left the room. Finally, the third paper came out of the Goblet of Fire. "And the Hogwarts champion is..." He paused, looking a bit worried before reading, "...Harry Potter."

Harry grinned as he gave Hermione's hand a squeeze. She squeezed his hand back. He saw looks of admiration from Fred, George, Ginny, and most members of his dueling club as he got up. He knew that others, including Ron, who was glaring at him, weren't happy, but then again, how often was everybody pleased with him? He walked up to Dumbledore, ignoring the murmuring coming from the crowd. He didn't notice the extremely flabbergasted look on the French boy Hermione had pointed out to him the day before.

He took the paper he recognized from the night before from the headmaster, who was frowning at him, although he had a slight

twinkle in his eye. He shook Albus' hand and began walking toward the room where Fleur and Viktor had disappeared to. Before he reached the door, however, he heard collective gasps. He turned to see Dumbledore catch another sheet of paper and decided to wait until he heard the name of the fourth champion.

"Harry Potter," muttered the wizened old man.

"What?" asked Harry, with a confused expression on his face, as he began walking back.

The headmaster cleared his throat. "Harry Potter's name has come out a second time." The blue flame from the goblet died. Harry stood rooted to the spot until Dumbledore turned toward him, looking just as confused as the teenager felt. A quick glance from the aged professor told Harry to go into the room with the other champions.

"What? You cannot be ze 'Ogwarts champion. You are just a little boy," said Fleur as he entered, followed by Dumbledore, with Mad-Eye, McGonagall, Madam Maxime, Professor Chekov, Barty Crouch, and Ludo Bagman following behind.

Dumbledore looked Harry in the eyes. "Did you put your name in the goblet of fire?"

"Yes, sir," he answered confidently.

"How?"

"I crumbled the paper up into a ball and tossed it in," he answered with a smirk. Dumbledore paled.

"Surely something as simple as that couldn't get past Dumbledore's age line," said Crouch arrogantly.

"I'm afraid that it did, Mr. Crouch. I prevented any object propelled by magic to cross the line, but failed to consider the muggle way of doing things. I must say that was an excellent shot, Harry."

"Thanks."

"The more important question is this; how many times did you put your name in?"

"Just the once," said Harry firmly. "I don't know why it came out again. I didn't even know it's possible."

"It's not supposed to be," said Moody.

"But it is quite extraordinary," commented Bagman enthusiastically.

"What iz to be done about it?" said Maxime. Harry noticed that she didn't seem upset about his name coming out. He figured that she believed that having a fourth-year compete would increase Fleur's odds of winning.

"The rules are absolute," said Crouch. "Mr. Potter will have to somehow compete twice."

"I vill not 'ave 'im scored twice!" shouted Maxime indignantly at that suggestion. Now she was upset.

"I quite agree!" said Chekov.

"What if," suggested Bagman, "he faces twice the...challenge in each event?" Dumbledore looked scared for a moment, while the other two headmasters looked happy.

"But he receives scores just the once?" clarified Chekov.

Dumbledore said, "Mr. Krum, Miss Delacour, and Mr. Potter, could you please wait outside?"

The walked outside, and the door was closed and silenced immediately. Fleur faced Harry. "How could you possibly believe zat you can compete, even if you are clever enough to get past ze age line? You are just a little boy and could get killed, even if you are ze Boy-Who-Lived."

Harry didn't like being called a little boy. "Because last semester I took the Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. and got the highest score since Dumbledore. Because I run a dueling club and have

beaten several seventh-years in demonstration duels. Because I've actually faced Death Eaters, not to mention Voldemort himself."

"You vrun a dueling club?" asked Viktor. "Vould it be alright if I attend?"

"Sure," he said, "as long as you sign a magically binding contract that you'll never help Voldemort. It's hexed so that if you break the contract, you will regret it," he said seriously. "I don't want to train Death Eaters."

"I do not know vhat you have heard about my school, but I am no Death Eater, and vill gladly sign this contract."

"I'm glad to hear it," Harry said evenly. He was forcing himself to behave professionally and not hate Krum simply because he might be interested in Hermione. "Our next meeting is tomorrow night right after dinner." He turned to Fleur. "You're welcome to come as well. Both of you can tell your classmates that they're invited, too, as long as they can sign that agreement."

At that moment, the door opened, revealing Professor Dumbledore. The others were behind him. "It has been decided that Mr. Potter will face each challenge once, but it will be twice the challenge that the others face for the first two events. However, the third task can't be made more challenging than it already is, so Mr. Potter will simply face it like everyone else. His scores will not be doubled for the first two events. I realize that it's not fair to you, Harry, but the others were adamant."

Taking a deep breath to control his temper at that news, he said, "I know you did your best."

"That I did," he answered.

Barty Crouch then said, "The first task will take place on November the twenty-fourth, in front of the other students and the panel of judges. Since it is designed to test your daring, we will not be telling you what it is, except that Mr. Potter will be facing twice as great a threat." After a few more details were explained, the champions were dismissed.

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Harry found a party in Gryffindor tower that he happily participated in. When asked how he entered twice, he told them, "I only entered once, and that was by tossing a wadded up paper ball into the goblet. I don't know how my name came out a second time." The rest of the room didn't seem to hear the last part of his statement as they clapped their hands, praising him for his genius. The Weasley twins seemed upset that they hadn't thought of it.

"That's all you had to do?" asked Hermione. "How could the headmaster have overlooked something that simple?"

"I guess he wasn't thinking like a muggle," said Harry, causing the crowd to burst into laughter.

After he explained that he was facing twice what the others were for the same amount of points, it seemed that all of Gryffindor was outraged, but none more than Hermione.

"That's totally unfair!" she exclaimed. "You're doing twice the work for the same prize. I know you could win the tournament normally, but now..."

"Now I'll just do the best that I can."

-

Ron wasn't speaking to Harry, but he didn't actually notice until it was pointed out to him by Ginny at dinner the next day.

"That prat thinks you should've told him how you were entering."

"Why?" asked Harry. "I figure that every cheater has to come up with his own method."

"We quite agree," said George from behind him.

"We didn't give Ronnikins our aging potion, either," said Fred.

“Anyway,” said Harry. “I think it’s time for our meeting. We might have new members tonight.”

-

Harry was correct about that, as several foreign students, including the two champions, lined up and signed the contract that Hermione had made for Harry upon his request when he started the club up a little over a month before. Harry noticed that Ron hadn’t shown up, now that he was aware of the problem. However, right now he had more important things to worry about.

Once the last new member had signed up, Harry stepped behind the podium in the room they used. “Alright. It’s time to begin. For those of you that are new, I welcome you. The way we do things here is that I’ll talk for a few minutes about a spell or technique, and then demonstrate it. After that, everybody pairs off and practices for the rest of the hour.”

“Vhy should we listen to a fourth-year like you?” asked one of the Durmstrang students.

Harry calmly replied, “I have passed my Defense O.W.L., and we are going over N.E.W.T. level material. But if you don’t want to listen, there’s the door.” He then pointed at the exit.

“I did not mean to insult you. I merely wished to understand your qualifications, so that I can decide if you have anything you can teach me.”

Harry fought his impulse to duel his challenger, as Hermione had told him that if he dueled everyone who challenged him, he’d never be able to rest. “How about this? You stay here for this lesson and participate. If you don’t feel you’ve gained anything from it, then don’t come back. No hard feelings. Agreed, Mr?”

“Bulgarov, Michael Bulgarov. Agreed.”

Harry then began his lesson as he always did, and had Cedric Diggory assist him with the demonstration of his ‘spell of the day.’ He used different assistants each lesson for the demonstrations. The

qualification for it was to working toward N.E.W.T.s. Moody had told Harry that he'd count it as extra credit for his class, so he had to report who helped him for each meeting. For that reason, Harry didn't use Hermione or Ginny for the demonstrations. They couldn't use extra credit for a class they weren't taking.

At the end of the meeting, Michael Bulgarov came up to him and said that he was very impressed with the class, and would definitely be returning. Both Krum and Fleur made similar statements, the Beauxbatons champion going as far as to apologize for saying he was a little boy, and saying that he was a worthy opponent.

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A few weeks later, Harry entered the Gryffindor Common room at about 1 a.m. looking very pale. Hermione, Neville and Ginny had waited up for him that night, because Hagrid had asked him to visit him with the invisibility cloak earlier that day in Hogsmeade.

"D-Dragons," muttered Harry.

"What?" asked Hermione as she was walking toward him.

"Four dragons. Two for me. I saw them."

Hermione paled this time. "Y-you've got to fight two dragons? They're mad!"

"Maybe signing up wasn't such a good idea," said Harry as he sat down.

"How can you fight two dragons at the same time?" asked Neville, looking a light shade of green.

"It's impossible," said Hermione, "unless...you've got no choice. Use your fire and air elements. It's either that or..."

"I've got an idea," said Ginny, excitedly. "What if you out-fly them on your Firebolt?"

"I can't bring a broom in there. All I can bring is a wand."

“Well,” said Hermione thoughtfully. “You could summon it and try it that way, but remember, if you get in trouble, don’t hold back, even if it means revealing those abilities.”

“I guess I should start practicing my summoning charm.”

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Sooner than Harry would’ve believed possible, November twenty-fourth arrived, and he found himself inside a tent with the other two champions. He definitely believed that he was twice as nervous as his opponents, although they did seem anxious as well. Viktor Krum walked up to him while Fleur was pacing up and down the tent in her own world.

“It is unfair that they are making you face two of them, is it not?”

“I think so,” agreed Harry.

“This girl you are dating, Hermy-own, is quite special, no?”

Harry’s features hardened. He wanted to make things very clear to Viktor. “Her-my-oh-nee is indeed very special. She’s been my best friend since I was eleven, and I’ve been dating her for over a year now.” He then added, “And I intend to keep dating her for as long as she’ll have me.”

“So, you are very serious about her?”

“Very,” said Harry, looking Krum straight in the eyes, as though daring him to question that.

“I just wondered, is all. You are a very lucky man.”

Before Harry could respond, the judges entered the tent.

After they revealed the secret that everybody knew (that the task was dragons), they told the champions that they had to retrieve the golden egg – in Harry’s case, two golden eggs. They had a bag with four dragon models in it, and let Harry pick first and last. He ended up with



a Swedish Short-Snout with a number one tied around its neck and a Hungarian Horntail with a four.

“Since your highest number is a four, Harry, you’ll be going last, and facing both dragons together. Fleur will be going first, facing a Welsh Green, while Viktor will go next, facing the Chinese Fireball,” said Ludo Bagman.

Afterwards, Ludo tried to offer Harry help privately, but Harry politely refused, saying, “I’ve got a plan worked out. I know...” At that moment, the whistle blew, and Bagman had to hurry out to announce Fleur.

Harry waited in silence, pacing the floor while Fleur, and later Krum, faced their dragons. When his name was called, he pulled out his wand and stepped outside the tent, saying, “Accio, Firebolt!” before he even looked at the two monsters he had to face.

The blueish-gray Swedish Short-Snout wasn’t paying him any attention, but the black, monstrous Hungarian Horntail was glaring at him with her yellow eyes, but not moving. Both dragons were on the other side of the enclosure, guarding their nests. Harry stood where he was until finally his broomstick came into view. He jumped on it and began to fly toward the dragons, not even noticing the tremendous applause that filled the stadium.

As he drew closer to the dragons, they began paying him more heed, until the Short-Snout sent a fireball at him, which he barely dodged in time. But now, he was too close to the Horntail, which swung its tail at him. He began flying away, but was hit in his left arm, which began bleeding as he screamed in pain. Even so, he managed to ‘roll with the punch’ so he didn’t lose control of his broom. He flew straight up to recuperate and form a plan.

*‘There’s no way I can fight two dragons at once,’* he thought to himself as he performed a simple healing charm on his arm that stopped the bleeding. *‘I need something to distract one...’* A daring, and some would say crazy, plan formed in his mind. He decided to do it and hope for the best.

He pulled his broom into a dive, stopping right in front of the Short-Snout's belly and shot a stinging hex at the Horntail's snout. He knew that it wouldn't hurt the dragon much, but if it annoyed her enough...His plan worked. The Horntail shot a fireball directly at Harry, who flew up and out of the way just in time for the Short-Snout to be burned. It roared in rage as Harry watched from above, spewing fire back at the dragon that had attacked it. The Horntail moved its wings, flying toward its opponent, swinging its tail into the Short-Snout's face, knocking it down. Harry dived to the Horntail's nest and grabbed the first egg, still not noticing the applause or announcements.

Putting the egg under his left arm, he streaked at top speed toward the other egg, while the dragons battled it out, grabbing it just before the Horntail noticed what had happened and blew a fireball at Harry, which hit the back of his robes as he hurried to the medical tent, knowing that he'd drop an egg if he tried to remove his robe.

Once he got inside, he let go of the eggs and pulled off his robe as Madam Pomfrey hurried up to him. The dragon handlers were out there breaking up the fight while someone else was putting out the fire on Harry's robe. He was wearing a pair of pants and a t-shirt with holes that had been burned in the back. The healer performed a spell, banishing the ruined shirt so that she could better examine him.

"You've got first degree burns on your neck and back. You're lucky your hair didn't catch fire. Let me see where the Horntail cut your arm." She looked at his work. "I see you stopped the bleeding. I'll just finish up the healing so you don't get a scar. I don't think you'll be scarred from your burns, either. I won't make you spend the night in the hospital wing, but if you have any trouble at all, I want you to come see me."

"Harry!" shouted Hermione as she ran into the tent. She was followed by Ginny and Neville. She engulfed him in a hug and kissed him thoroughly. Madam Pomfrey simply began treating his burns.

Finally, the kissing was interrupted by the loud voice of Hagrid proudly shouting, "Yeh did it, Harry! I knew ya could! An' against two dragons!"

When they separated, Harry noticed fingernail marks on his girlfriend's face where she had obviously been clutching it in fear. "You were absolutely brilliant!" she declared.

He was congratulated by the others, and Professor McGonagall conjured him a new t-shirt while praising his flying ability. "Now, make sure you change out of it as soon as you get back to Gryffindor tower. It'll disappear in a few hours."

He went out to see his scores. Dumbledore and Bagman gave him ten points each, while Crouch, Maxime (with a reluctant look on her face) and Chekov (with an unreadable expression) gave him nine points. He figured that they were easy on him because he'd faced two dragons. His total score was forty-seven points, which put him in first place.

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## **Dumbledore Answers Harry – Chapter 31 – Bubble-head**

When Harry got back to the castle, he found a party in Gryffindor tower, wherein Maxime, Crouch and Chekov were berated for giving him only nine out of ten when he'd gotten past two dragons. After some encouragement from the crowd, both Harry and Hermione opened the two golden eggs he'd acquired at the same time. The result was practically deafening as the screeching filled the Common Room until both eggs were closed.

"That's certainly odd," said Hermione while rubbing her ears.

"Really," said Harry sarcastically.

"Maybe you have to face a banshee," suggested Seamus.

"Or worse," said George.

"Percy singing," said Fred.

"The horror!" they proclaimed together with mock-terrified expressions.

Harry couldn't help but laugh at their antics. Hermione said, "Obviously, there's a secret to opening it. We'll have to spend some time..."

"In the library," said Ginny with a smirk, earning a quick glare from Hermione.

-

A few weeks later, Harry was getting discouraged about the eggs. All the time spent in the library researching hadn't accomplished anything. They'd studied about dragon eggs, screams, and gold (what the eggs were made of), but nothing helped.

When they'd heard about the Yule Ball coming up, Harry immediately asked his girlfriend to come with him, which she answered with a very deep kiss that made him forget what he'd asked her to do in the first

place. He knew that Neville had asked Ginny to be his date, and that Ron had asked Lavender.

He, Hermione and Ginny were slightly ahead in their D.A.D.A. N.E.W.T. revising, and the dueling club was going well. Harry was also doing well in his other classes, but was glad that the only test he had to take at the end of the year would be his N.E.W.T. Ginny was jealous of that fact, but Hermione felt that Harry was being cheated by not being allowed to take the end-of-year exams. However, those tests were over six months away, so he didn't have to worry about them now.

Now, Harry's only concern was finding out why he, Hermione and Ginny had been summoned to Dumbledore's office. It was Sunday morning right after breakfast. He had an idea of why, but didn't want to get his hopes up. Besides, if it was what he thought, it would probably be dangerous.

-

"Good morning, sir," said Harry as they were seated.

"Good morning, all three of you. Would any of you care for a lemon drop?"

As usual, Harry and Hermione politely declined while Ginny took one. They all looked expectantly at the professor.

"The reason why I have summoned you three here is that I believe I have found the location of the final Horcrux," the headmaster said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"That's great," said Harry enthusiastically. "Where?"

"Inside Hogwarts itself," he answered excitedly. "I can't believe I didn't think of it before. Follow me." He walked out the door and down the stairs.

They followed him in silence through the seventh-floor corridor and down three flights of stairs until they were on the fourth floor. He then led them down that corridor, eventually encountering the statue of

Boris the Bewildered, a lost-looking wizard with his gloves on the wrong hands. Dumbledore stopped at the fourth door to the left of it and said, "Pine fresh." As the door opened, the headmaster said, "Last night, I informed the prefects that this bathroom would be off-limits for the day."

"Bathroom?" asked Harry.

"The Prefect's Bathroom," said Hermione in awe as they walked into the room with a candle-filled chandelier, and everything made of white marble. Sunk into the middle of the floor was a swimming pool instead of a bathtub. About a hundred golden taps stood all around the pool's edges, each with a differently colored jewel set into its handle. On the wall was a single golden-framed painting of a blonde mermaid who was fast asleep on a rock, her long hair over her face.

Dumbledore walked up to the painting and said, "Ariel."

"Yes, Headmaster," came a squeaky voice from the painting, followed by a yawn.

"May I temporarily remove you while I inspect the wall behind you?"

"Of course, sir," she squeaked. "It's been a long time since I was moved. That handsome Head Boy did, though, a long time ago."

"Riddle," murmured Harry, "fifty years ago."

Dumbledore turned from the portrait while saying, "Tom's prefectship was his first taste of actual authority and power, which he craves more than anything. I believe he hid a Horcrux here simply because it's the only place in the school where prefects and heads are allowed but other students are not." Turning back to the painting, he said, "We must be careful. Everyone, get out of direct view of the painting before I levitate it. Be ready for anything."

They all complied as they got their wands out. With a flick of Dumbledore's wand, the painting floated away, and a green beam of light shot straight forward above the pool, hitting the wall on the other side. It was hard to see the wall behind the painting from where Harry was, but he couldn't tell the difference between that part of the wall

and the rest. Albus performed a detection spell and declared, "There's nothing else behind the painting beside that protection. This is most puzzling."

Hermione said, "It can't be for no reason. He didn't just set random death traps everywhere. That was a killing curse that hit...the other wall." She turned her attention to the other side of the room, where a new hole had just been formed. She then performed a dark magic detection spell on that spot, and what looked like a purple flame shot straight at her.

"Hermione!" Harry screamed. She moved a little, but got caught in the shoulder. She fell to the floor unconscious. Harry ran to her while Dumbledore began shooting spells at the hole. "Don't be dead," Harry muttered as he checked her for a pulse, and was greatly relieved that there was one. "Thank God!" Then he tried reviving her. Nothing he did seemed to help his girlfriend.

He didn't see what spells Dumbledore had to do to get past the trap, but apparently he had, because when he looked up, he saw that the wall where the purple flame had come from now had some of the plaster removed, and an opening was there, which had what appeared to be Hufflepuff's cup on it. Dumbledore looked at him. "Mr. Potter, might I suggest you levitate Miss Granger to the hospital wing whilst Miss Weasley and I deal with this Horcrux? We shall join you shortly."

Harry realized that Ginny was also a fire elemental, and should be able to destroy the cup the same way he'd destroyed Ravenclaw's quill. He pointed his wand at his girlfriend. "Wingardium Leviosa."

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After Madam Pomfrey performed a diagnostic spell on Hermione, she was able to determine what spell she'd been hit with, which was fortunately weaker than it would've been if cast by an actual witch or wizard, but it still did enough damage to keep her in the hospital wing until that Friday morning, taking ten potions a day. Harry had quite a chore keeping her stocked up with books so she wouldn't get too bored in the Hospital Wing. Fortunately, (from her point of view) she got out just in time to take the end-of-term exams.

-

On Christmas day, Harry awoke to find many presents on his bed, which he happily opened, finding that he'd gotten a good haul – mostly defensive books or devices, including a wand holster that could attach to his leg or arm from Sirius. He got a bottle of cologne from Hermione, along with instructions to wear some to the Ball. For his part, he'd gotten Hermione a new pair of earrings. He found out that Sirius had gotten Hermione the same kind of wand holster he'd received.

Harry spent the whole day with Hermione, kissing and talking, until she left to get ready for the dance far earlier than he thought she'd have to. However, he was definitely not disappointed with how she looked when she came down the stairs. She was wearing a periwinkle blue dress with her hair in a French braid. "Y-you look beautiful," he managed to say after staring at her for about ten seconds.

"Thank you," she said with a grin. "You look quite handsome, and you smell very good with that cologne. Shall we go?"

-

Harry was amazed at how different the Great Hall looked as they entered for the Yule Ball. It was hardly recognizable. As he and Hermione made their way up to the Champion's table, he commented, "I'm glad they didn't make me take two dates here," earning a small slap on the arm.

They found that Viktor Krum had brought one of the Ravenclaw seventh-year girls, Mindy Runkle, who was in the dueling club. She was a moderately pretty girl who got good grades and did exceptionally well in the club Harry ran. Percy Weasley was there as well, but did not speak to Harry or Hermione. Obviously, he still blamed Harry for the fact that he hadn't been Head Boy, and was consequently making less money at the Ministry than he would have. However, engaging in small talk with Hermione, Viktor and Mindy was distracting enough to stop Harry from bursting into tears over the fact that Percy didn't like him.



Before long, the Weird Sisters began the music, and the champions had to start off the dancing. Harry sighed as he faced the inevitable, glad that he had learned how to dance at Sirius' wedding.

Hermione looked in his eyes for about a second before a frown appeared on her face. "You don't really want to dance, do you?" she whispered.

He denied it. "No, I..."

"You have to dance this once. Then we can..."

"Hermione," he whispered, "Maybe I don't like dancing much, but I know that you do. We'll dance as much as you want tonight." He grinned at her. "Consider it a Christmas present." She smiled back at her boyfriend and allowed him to lead her around the floor. He did enjoy having his arms around her, but didn't really liked dancing. However, it was obvious that Hermione did enjoy it, so he decided that he'd do his best to keep her happy. The next song was a fast one, and Harry liked it better than the slow ballad that the first song had been.

After several songs, they finally stopped dancing when Hermione said, "Harry, I think you've earned a break from the dance floor. Thank you for dancing with me for so long. I know you didn't enjoy it as much as me." Leaning closer to his ear so she could whisper, she said, "And later I'll thank you properly for it, not to mention wearing that cologne for me."

"I..."

"I understand," she said before giving him a quick kiss with a smirk. "Everybody enjoys different things. I just want to say that it means a lot to me that you're willing to dance just for me."

"I'll do anything for you," he declared, looking her in the eyes, with a smile that made her go weak at the knees.

She kissed him again and then smirked. "Since you'll do anything for me, why don't you get us drinks while I find us a table?"

"Sure," he said, chuckling slightly, and headed toward the small table set up with the punch bowl. He noticed that the Beauxbatons student that had glared at him a few times the day the schools arrived was standing near the table. He appeared to be in a good mood. Harry quickly fixed himself a cup and took a drink, and then ladled out another glass of punch.

"Hello," said the French student. "My name is Jean-Luc LaForge." He reached out his right hand, leaving his left near the table.

Caught off guard, Harry shook it automatically, leaving Hermione's cup on the table near Jean-Luc's left hand. "Er, hi. My name is..."

"Zer iz no need for your introduction. Everybody knowz your name. I would like to zay that it iz an honor to meet you, Harry Potter."

"Er, thanks. I need to get back to my date. It was, um, good meeting you," he said as he took off, remembering to grab his girlfriend's drink off the table.

"Ze pleasure waz all mine."

-

Harry found his girlfriend sitting at a table with Neville, Ginny, Ron and Lavender. "Hi, everyone," he said before sitting next to Hermione. He then handed her the glass of punch he'd gotten her, which she took gratefully, immediately drinking deeply from it.

The music started again while Hermione was swallowing, and Lavender said, "Won-won, let's dance again," and practically dragged her boyfriend out of his seat.

Neville turned to Ginny. "Would you like to dance?"

She smiled at him. "Sure." They left the table.

Harry turned to Hermione, whose eyes looked slightly spaced out. Before he could say anything, Mr. LaForge was standing behind her saying, "Miss Granger, would you do me ze honor of zharing thiz dance?"

Harry's mouth opened and shut in surprise. Before he could say anything, his girlfriend was walking off with another bloke, who was putting his arm around her waist. He frowned. He didn't know if he'd get in trouble with Hermione for this or not, but he didn't like the way that guy was holding her. He accidentally smashed the glass he was holding when he saw Hermione kiss Jean-Luc on the cheek while laughing with her dance partner. He stood up as he watched in horror while his girlfriend began practically dragging that bloke off the dance floor and out of the Great Hall.

Harry began walking fast as a look of anger and hurt came across his face. He thought to himself, *"If she doesn't like me anymore, she could at least admit it and break up! Not act like a..."* He shook his head. *"That's not like Hermione. Something is wrong."* He followed the 'happy couple' down a flight of stairs, trying to catch up without running and being stopped by a teacher. The bloke was grinning ear-to-ear as he let her lead him toward the dungeons, where Harry knew one of their favorite broom closets was located.

He was on the staircase when he remembered the spaced-out look in Hermione's eyes after she'd taken that drink, and further remembered that the bloke had been near her drink a few minutes before. His face was turning red as he came to the only conclusion that made any sense. Hermione had been given a love potion. Jean-Luc LaForge was about to get hurt.

Harry's anger only doubled as he watched his girlfriend open up their broom closet and step inside, still holding that French...bloke's hand. He whipped his wand out without consciously deciding to, and summoned Jean-Luc straight at him.

"Harry, stop!" shouted Hermione. "I love him! It's over between us. Don't..."

At that moment, Harry wasn't listening to his girlfriend. He was putting his wand away and clenching his fist. When Mr. LaForge got close enough from being summoned, Harry punched him in the face with everything he had. He fell backwards with a broken nose and blood everywhere.

“Harry, how could you!” Hermione shouted. He glanced up to see her reaching for the wand that had been on her thigh holster – the only place she could put it without interfering with her robes.

Harry didn’t let himself enjoy the view, however, as he quickly drew his wand and said, “Sorry. *Petrificus Totalus*.” She fell to the floor just as Harry felt LaForge pull him to the ground. Harry pulled back his right hand and rammed his fist in Jean-Luc’s face again. This time, a metal flask fell out of his pocket. The container burst open and the contents, a thick liquid, were spilled all over the floor.

“Stop this minute!” shouted Professor W. P. Mathews, who’d been teaching Potions ever since Snape had been fired. The two stopped fighting and looked at the tall, thin man with blonde hair and beard, who was pointing his wand at them. “You,” he said, pointing at LaForge. “What were you doing with a flask of Polyjuice potion?”

Harry looked at his opponent with even more contempt as he began stuttering, “Zat’s not poly...”

“I know Polyjuice when I see it! Get up! You, too, Mr. Potter.” He then flicked his wand toward Hermione, who immediately got up.

She glared at Harry. “Professor Mathews, Harry started attacking my new boyfriend because he’s jealous! Look, he even broke poor Jean-Luc’s nose. He should be expelled!”

Harry said as calmly as he could, “I think *Jean-Luc* slipped her a love potion, sir.”

“That’s ridiculous,” huffed Hermione while crossing her arms. “I am in love with Jean-Luc. He doesn’t need to...”

“Since whoever this is had Polyjuice on them, I tend to believe your suspicions, however, a simple spell will confirm it.” Mathews pointed his wand at Hermione.

“Stop!” she said before glowing green for a moment.

“That confirms it,” said the professor as he pointed his wand back to Jean-Luc. By this time, Harry was also pointing his wand at him as

well. The captive was trembling in fear. "Miss Granger, you have been given a love potion."

"Maybe Harry gave it to me, trying to win me away from my true love, Jean-Luc." Harry could see laughter in his teacher's eyes. "Why haven't you taken him to the hospital wing yet? He's hurt."

"Of course," said Mathews. "March to the hospital wing," he said coldly to the prisoner, who complied.

-

When they arrived at Madam Pomfrey's domain, she immediately asked, "What's happened? Have these students been fighting?"

Before she could do anything else, Jean-Luc's skin started bubbling over as he reshaped into a different man. He was shorter but his robes were tighter. He had a bald patch on his head, and, although it was hard to tell since it was broken, a pointed nose. The most unusual aspect of this character was that he had a silver right hand.

"Wormtail," Harry hissed. "I see your master gave you a new hand."

"I don't care what you look like or what your name is," declared Hermione loudly. "I love you."

Harry closed his fist, ready to punch the trembling Pettigrew again.

"Mr. Potter, stop!" said Professor Mathews, who was now holding a vial of potion. "This'll cure Miss Granger, so she won't be..."

"If it'll take away the last vestiges of the potion Harry's been using on me, then I'll drink it," she said, taking the container from the Potions Master and downing it in one gulp.

For a moment, her eyes were out of focus, and then she blinked. Harry watched realization and then horror come across her face, as it turned very red. With a soft, trembling voice, she said, "I-I'm s-sorry, Harry," and then turned to the still bleeding Pettigrew. "YOU FILTHY, STINKING, RAT!" she screamed before punching his jaw and kicking

him in the crotch. She then ran outside, and Harry heard her beginning to sob.

He turned to the rat, who was now on the floor, and picked him up by the hair he had left. "Why did you have to bother her," he hissed quietly.

"Sh-she was pretty, and I th-thought that I d-deserved..."

"DESERVED!?! I'll give you what you deserve you..."

"Harry!" interrupted Professor Dumbledore, who'd just arrived with McGonagall. "Aurors are on their way, and I have some questions for Mr. Pettigrew."

"Then ask them," snarled Harry, still glaring at the traitor in his hands. "I'll make sure he answers." At this moment, a clear, yellowish liquid came dripping out from under the prisoner's robe as he trembled in fear.

"Alas," said Dumbledore calmly, while others in the room were chuckling at Wormtail's loss of bladder control. "As I'd like our prisoner to survive his interrogation, I believe it would be best if you left the room. Besides, I believe that Miss Granger may need to speak with you."

"Fine," Harry said, and dropped the rat back on the floor; his face landed in the puddle. "You'd better not lose him."

"Do not worry," said Albus. "I shall insure that he cannot escape." He then pointed his wand at Wormtail, who glowed pink for a moment. "Now he cannot change form. However, if he proves uncooperative, we shall call you back to assist us." Pettigrew started trembling even more.

Harry knew that it was a bluff, but thought it might be a helpful one. "In that case, I hope he doesn't answer your questions," he said before walking off to look for his girlfriend.

Hermione Granger had never been more embarrassed in her life. This was supposed to be a great night – a romantic night for her and Harry. Instead, she'd almost dragged that...that rat into a broom closet to..." She shuddered as she thought about what could have happened. Tears were freely falling from her eyes as her feet carried her further away from the hospital wing. She was actually surprised to find herself outside the door to the bathroom where a troll had once attacked her, before Harry jumped on its back to save her. She opened the door and entered because she'd always thought it was a good place to cry.

-

Harry had been all over the castle. He'd checked the library, the Room of Requirement and even had a second-year Gryffindor girl he met in their common room go up into Hermione's dorm (He does not have the Marauder's Map in this story) to see if she were there. He was getting desperate by this time. He thought of a long shot, but didn't know any other place to try, so he started walking toward the location where he'd first become friends with the most important person in his life.

As he approached the door, he heard sobbing and couldn't help the small smile in his face that he had located her. He knocked on the door. "Hermione, is that you?"

"Go away!" he heard his girlfriend's voice from the other side of the door.

"I'm coming in, so cover up if you're not decent." He slowly opened the door, giving her time to do just that. "I'm inside now," he called out before looking around for her. She didn't respond, but he could still hear her sobs coming from inside a stall. He could also see her feet dangling above the floor. "If you don't answer, I'll be opening that door."

"Harry, I'm sorry. G-go away. I need to be alone. I..."

"You feel bad about..."

"BAD? Bad is far too small a word for what happened. I feel humiliated, disgraced, mortified, embarrassed, used..."

"It wasn't your fault, Hermione!" he half-shouted at her. With a much softer voice, he added, "It was mine."

"Yours?" she repeated.

"Yes. I'm the one who got you that bloody drink. I should've paid more attention. I understand if you're mad and want to..."

"It wasn't your fault, Harry. You just..."

"And it wasn't yours, either. Please come out."

She opened the door, revealing her red eyes with tear-lines running down her cheeks. Harry immediately hugged her, and she embraced him back. After a few minutes, she finally said, "I guess we should both be more careful."

"Maybe we should start carrying flasks like Mad-Eye does," Harry suggested, earning a small giggle from Hermione. "What do you say we go back to the party?"

"I, I don't know..."

"Nobody knows what happened. If you dry your face, then no one will know you were crying. I promise that I'll dance every song they play for the rest of the night with you."

After a few seconds, she finally said, "Alright."

-

They returned to the dance, and enjoyed the rest of the evening. Dumbledore later revealed that Pettigrew admitted to having placed Harry's name into the goblet of fire, and that he'd killed the real Jean-Luc LaForge in France before the Beauxbatons students left for the tournament. However, when Dumbledore asked him what else he'd done, Wormtail opened his mouth to speak, and started choking as if he were being strangled. Despite Pomfrey and Dumbledore's efforts,



he went into a type of magical coma that no one could bring him out of before he could answer the question. He was placed under guard in the secure ward of St. Mungo's hospital, where they were told that he might be able to change into a rat if he woke up (Dumbledore's spell wouldn't last forever), so they made sure that no rat would be able to escape.

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A few days after term started up again, Harry and Hermione were walking together hand-in-hand. "Have you made any progress on your eggs?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No. You know I'd tell you if I had. I just don't have a clue how that screaming is supposed to tell me anything."

"I don't know, either. I guess the best thing to do is practice every defensive spell we know. We should get Ginny, too. We don't know how many opponents they'll make you face."

Shrugging his shoulders, Harry said, "I suppose so. I suppose I should practice my idea for defeating Voldemort. I can't imagine the second task being worse than that."

And so, they got Ginny and went over Harry's defense strategy, including everything he knew about the bubble-head charm, which he suspected Riddle might modify to compensate for his breathing problem. The Boy-Who-Lived knew how to cast it (in case he found himself in a situation with no air) and how to remove it. He also knew a lot of powerful hexes and jinxes. He figured that if he had to, he could always use his elemental powers, but he would only do that to save his life – not to win the tournament. He really wanted those to be a secret.

-

As much as he tried, Harry could not figure out what the egg clue was supposed to mean, and before he knew it, it was the night before the second task of the tournament. The trio was studying in the Common Room, and Harry was getting very nervous about the next day. The portrait hole opened, revealing Professor McGonagall. She walked

straight up to them with a neutral expression on her face, and said without emotion, "I need to speak with Miss Granger and Miss Weasley in private, and I'd suggest you get on to bed, Mr. Potter. You have a long day ahead of you."

Reluctantly, Harry complied and went to bed, deciding to ask the girls what McGonagall had wanted to speak to them about in the morning. However, when he got up, he couldn't find them. At breakfast, he went up to his head of house at the staff table and asked, "Do you know where Hermione and Ginny are?"

With a slightly vacant expression, she said, "They will be the hostages you have to rescue."

His eyes widened. "Hostages?!" he repeated loudly. This seemed to clear up McGonagall's expression.

"Yes, hostages," she said, "and you will not raise your voice to me again, Mr. Potter, unless you wish to have a detention."

"I'm sorry, Professor," he said, "but I was surprised. They're hostages?"

"Yes. They are what we feel you will sorely miss."

He now had a puzzled expression. "Sorely miss?"

"Surely you figured out the egg clue," she said, looking at him in horror.

Looking down in shame, he answered, "No, Professor."

McGonagall's eyes took on a vacant expression again, but Harry didn't notice as he was still looking down. "You were supposed to open the eggs underwater."

He looked up at her. "What? How would I figure that out?"

"The point is that the merpeople in the Black lake are holding hostages for each champion," she whispered. "You'll have one hour to swim to their village and rescue the girls."

Harry's jaw dropped. His mind raced, looking for a solution to the problem. "The bubble-head charm," he muttered with relief a few seconds later.

"Excellent idea," she said. "You do know the charm, right?"

"Yeah."

"Then I suggest you go back to the common room to get more appropriate attire before the task."

"Thanks," he said and hurried back to the Gryffindor table, grabbing a slice of toast and gulping down some pumpkin juice. He then took all the shortcuts he knew to get to Gryffindor tower so he could put on a pair of swimming trunks and a sleeveless t-shirt. He decided to put his wand holster on his right leg. He was very glad that he'd been able to use the pool at Potter Manor for the last few years so he could properly swim, and also that he hadn't needed glasses since he'd corrected his vision. He put a school robe on over his other clothes and hurried down to the lake, knowing that the task was about to begin.

-

He arrived at the lake to find the other two champions there already. Krum said, "At least they are only making you rescue two hostages and not going back into the lake a second time."

"Yeah," he agreed before Bagman announced that it was time to begin.

Harry shed his robe as he stepped out of his shoes. He then grabbed his wand and performed the bubble-head charm, creating a bubble of air around his face. He put the wand back in its holster and dove into the water, noticing that Fleur had done the same thing, but Krum was already gone.

The first thing he noticed was that the water was absolutely freezing as he swam deeper into the lake. The second thing was how awesome it was to be able to stay underwater without running out of air, and made a mental note to do this the next time he went

swimming at home. When he thought he was deep enough, he started moving toward the center of the lake in search of the mer-village. In the corner of his eye, he noticed that Fleur was swimming faster than him, and got an idea.

Closing his eyes for a moment as he used his metamorph powers, he changed his hands and feet to make them webbed, and began to move a lot faster. He noticed grindylows among the weeds at the bottom of the lake as he continued moving gracefully, despite the cold that he was slowly getting used to. He heard a weird sound behind him and turned to see Fleur being attacked by about a dozen of those water demons. Without thinking about it, he pulled out his wand and shot a spell at the largest portion of the group, separating all but two of them from their victim, who quickly disposed of them before smiling at Harry and swimming off.

Unfortunately, this also had the affect of provoking the grindylows, who were now after Harry. He began swimming as quickly as possible, and used his air element to keep them away from him, forming a huge bubble between them that they couldn't penetrate. As he continued hurrying, he wondered if he could replicate the bubble-head charm with that element.

He found the village in time to see Krum with a shark's head trying to figure out how to loosen the rope tied around the girl he'd taken to the Yule Ball. Next to her was a little girl that looked like a younger version of Fleur, and next to the little girl were Hermione and Ginny. All of the hostages seemed to be in an enchanted sleep, and there were mermen guarding them, yet they weren't bothering Viktor. Harry approached his hostages and took a glance at Krum, who was now swimming toward the bottom. Harry figured he was looking for a rock to break the ropes with. Seeing that the coast was clear, he used his air element to create a small pocket of air around a bit of each rope, and then used his fire element to burn that section of rope, freeing them. He put his arms around both waists, and prepared to swim upward, when he felt a familiar tugging sensation behind his navel. He didn't notice that the other two champions were watching him disappear.

Dripping wet, his hands and feet still webbed, and a bubble-head charm still over his head, Harry looked around. He quickly morphed his hands and feet back to normal, hoping it wouldn't be noticed as he watched Hermione and Ginny wake up on either side of him.

"Harry," said Hermione, looking around, "where are we?"

"I don't know. I grabbed both of you and we were portkeyed away." They were in a large, empty room with a high ceiling. All the walls had been painted black. Even the tile that they were now standing on was black, and Harry missed his shoes. "I'm freezing," he said as he used his fire element to warm them all up just enough. He pulled out his wand and took off the bubble-head charm. The others tried to pull out their wands.

"It's gone!" Ginny declared. "My wand is gone!"

"Mine, too!" said Hermione. "And I know I had it on me."

"McGonagall!" said both girls together.

"What about McGonagall?" asked Harry, now concerned.

"She was acting strangely last night," said Hermione.

"Like she'd been Imperius'd or something," added Ginny.

"How right you are," hissed a voice from the only door in the room, which had now opened. Harry would recognize that voice, as well as the red eyes and snake-like appearance of Voldemort. Harry was glad to see a few scars on his face from their last encounter. He was holding his wand and was followed by twenty masked Death Eaters, all with their wands at the ready. "I am glad that Wormtail was able to bewitch your head of house before his...indiscretion. It is a pity that he didn't get to enjoy a mudblood for the only thing they're good for. Isn't that right, Harry?"

"Don't lose your temper," Hermione whispered in Harry's ear. "The Horcruxes are gone so you can..."

“Stop whispering sweet nothings into your lover’s ear, mudblood whore!” He flicked his wand slightly, and both girls were pushed to either side of the room, where four of Riddle’s slaves grabbed each. “Just hold them, for now. Business first, fun later. No celebrations until after Potter dies,” he said to his servants, who were looking at both girls like they were pieces of meat. “Now, Harry Potter and I shall duel, and I want no one to interfere as I prove once and for all, that I am the most powerful wizard alive.” He then aimed his wand at Harry. “Crucio!” he shouted, and Harry quickly moved out of the way.

“Reducto!” he countered. Riddle dodged, but panted a bit.

“Avada Kedavra!” Harry ducked just in time. The green beam of light hit the wall.

For about five minutes, they kept shooting spells at each other and missing (with Death Eaters dodging just in time to avoid being hit), and Voldemort was panting hard. He put up a bubble-head charm and began to breath normally.

Harry pointed his wand at the bubble and caused it to collapse, angering Riddle.

“Crucio!” he shouted, finally hitting Harry in the chest. He fell to the floor, dropping his wand as the girls watched in horror. The Death Eaters were now laughing.

As Harry thrashed on the floor, he realized that it was now or never. He looked at Voldemort’s wand hand and set in on fire.

“Ah!” he shouted for a moment as he dropped his wand. The fire began spreading as a look of realization came upon him “It was you, Potter. You were the elemental at the train. Now we’ll duel for real.” Suddenly wind blew at Voldemort, putting the fire out. The floor beneath Harry’s bare feet turned into quicksand and he started running in place to keep from sinking. His wand was already below the surface when the Dark Lord began to rise above the floor, his black robe billowing in the wind he was creating.

‘Cool!’ thought Harry. *‘I never realized I could do that with air.’*

Theatrically, Voldemort pointed his hand at the Boy-Who-Lived. “And now, your pitiful life will be snuffed out by too much air.

Harry felt wind coming toward him, but countered with his own wind, at the same time making himself rise very clumsily from the floor.

“You control air as well?” asked Voldemort. “Impressive.” He sent a burst of wind at Harry, who fell, but still managed to stay afloat. To everyone there, it looked like he was lying on a bed of air, using a trick some muggle magicians have done.

Hermione saw her chance and took it. The floor beneath every Death Eater in the room became quicksand. A moment later, Ginny lit all their wands on fire, causing them to drop their only weapons into the quicksand they were rapidly sinking into. Just as during the Hogwarts Express attack of fourteen months ago, Hermione didn’t solidify the floor until only their heads were showing.

In the meantime, Harry was throwing fireballs at Tom, who was using the wind to blow them out, although he did get hit with a few that made a few extra scars on Riddle’s ugly face. Harry was suddenly hit from behind with what felt like a Bludger, but turned out to be a chunk of the floor. He shook his head and sent more fire at his nemesis. During that distraction, Harry used the wind to get him closer to Voldemort. Close enough to punch him in the stomach hard.

The asthma-like condition in his foe immediately surfaced, and he was gasping for air even as his wind element blasted Harry away from him. He saw a bubble of air appear around Tom’s head, and realized that he’d figured out how to use that element as a bubble-head charm. He focused on his own air control and stretched out that bubble, creating a vacuum inside it. He watched in disgust as Riddle gasped in horror, but knew what he had to do. He felt Voldemort try to eliminate the bubble, but Harry was concentrating much more at this moment. He kept stretching out the air pocket until finally, in a rather disgusting display, Tom Marvolo Riddle’s head exploded.

Harry closed his eyes and barely stopped himself from retching at the sight. He lowered himself to the floor to see that Hermione and Ginny had taken out all the other Death Eaters, who were screaming profanities and threats at all of them until they realized that their

master had been bested by a teenage boy. In unison, they all shut up as he glared at them.

He locked eyes with Hermione for a moment, and she nodded at him with a grim face. They all knew that now wasn't the time to celebrate. "Let's see if we can get my wand, Hermione," he said. She closed her eyes and concentrated as the area around where his wand had fallen became like quicksand again. Only this time, Hermione had the quicksand moving up and out for about five minutes until, finally, Harry's wand emerged. He caused a breeze to bring it to him safely before Hermione solidified the floor again.

"Thank you very much. Now, let's get out of here," he said as he walked toward the door. Just before opening it, he said, "This will confuse them until you two do the same thing to any other '*friends*' we meet." He then morphed himself to look like Voldemort wearing tight trunks and a sleeveless t-shirt. He looked down at himself. "Can I borrow one of your robes?"

"Sure." Hermione took off her Gryffindor robe, revealing her jeans and a green jumper.

He opened the door and the dozen enemies in their immediately came to attention. One asked, "Is the pretender dead, my master?"

Harry grinned as all the wands in the room caught fire and the floor turned into quicksand. "He is." He then used his air element to cause the fire on two of the wands to go out as they sailed at the girls, so they would be able to perform regular spells.

The trio left those and the other twenty-six Death Eaters they found in that compound up to their necks in floor. When they walked out the door, Harry said, "I wish I'd found an extra pair of shoes."

"Do either of you have any idea where we are?" asked Ginny.

Harry shook his head while Hermione said, "No. Fortunately, I do still have a portkey necklace."

"Me, too," said Ginny.



“I left mine in my trunk,” Harry said miserably. I didn’t want to lose them in the lake.”

“Understandable,” said Hermione, supportively, although Harry could tell that she thought it was a bit foolish.

“I wish we could just apparate,” Harry said.

“Well, we can’t,” said Hermione, “but we can floo from the house my portkey leads to.”

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Within minutes, the three teenagers, looking distinctly out-of-place, appeared at the Ministry atrium, having floo’d there from one of Harry’s houses. He still wasn’t wearing any shoes. They saw a group of ‘Life Force’ members running toward the apparition point when one of them shouted, “They’re right here!”

All of them stopped and looked at the three teenagers, along with everyone else in that huge room. “It is him!” said another LF member. I can see his scar.” He walked up to them. “We got a report that you three disappeared from the Triwizard Tournament. What happened?”

After telling them, Kingsley Shacklebolt, who’d been summoned there, taught Harry how to lead him in apparating, even when he wasn’t performing the apparition itself. It was a rare variation of Side-Along Apparition. Once the auror had briefly checked out the place (and saw Voldemort’s corpse), he apparated Harry back to the Ministry and created a portkey to bring several other officials to the spot.

Harry, Hermione and Ginny flooed to Hogwarts, where they learned that the two competing Headmasters insisted that Harry lose points because he was two hours late returning to the surface of the water. He received thirty points out of fifty for the task. McGonagall, who found the girls’ wands in her quarters, tried to apologize for her part in the kidnapping, but Harry assured her that it wasn’t her fault.

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**Epilogue:** (more like a summary)

The rest of the school year passed without incident, aside from the awards ceremony that Harry, Hermione and Ginny had to attend to get their Orders of Merlin. Harry got first class while the girls got second class. They continued their N.E.W.T. studies in D.A.D.A., despite the fact that the prophecy was no longer hanging over Harry's head. The 3rd task came and went with no incident, and Harry managed to win the tournament.

After that, he, Hermione and Ginny took their DADA N.E.W.T. The tester commented that, "After defeating You-Know-Who, this test is only a formality." Harry didn't have to take any other final exams because he was in the tournament, but the girls both aced theirs.

With Voldemort gone, Dumbledore told Harry that he no longer had to stay with the Dursleys at all. This was probably the best news Harry had ever gotten.

The twins set up their shop almost immediately after the term ended, but were convinced to study for and take the N.E.W.T.s for the three subjects they had O.W.L.s in by Ginny.

Draco finally returned to Hogwarts for his fifth year, but he was taking all sixth-year classes since he'd managed to earn his O.W.L.s during that summer. He managed to properly gloat at Harry and Hermione about it, but it wasn't as hateful as it used to be. They never would exactly be friends, but they didn't have animosity like before. His mother moved back into Malfoy manor when Draco started attending Hogwarts.

Ron and Lavender broke up during the summer before their fifth year. Harry and Hermione married right after they finished Hogwarts. Neville and Ginny did a year later, after she finished.

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Harry and Hermione had the careers you want them to have, and the children you want them to have, and they all lived happily ever after.

The End

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I hope you've enjoyed this story, and renew the challenge that I made long ago. Write an original story based off the premise of this one – Dumbledore answers the questions Harry asked at the end of his first year. I don't care what girl you pair him with. Let me know if you do, so that I can read it. You can even use the first scene of this story if you'd like, but the rest has to be original.

I hope you don't mind the careers and kids line. I've already written them having the careers and kids I'd like them to have in other stories, so I thought I'd leave it up to you. Maybe you can let me know what you'd choose for them in your reviews.

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

By the way, in this HBP (but not DH) compatible story, Harry's scar is not a Horcrux, and his mastery of occlumency allowed him to face Voldemort without pain.